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The Lost Word

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The Lost Word

By

Evelyn Underhill 1875–

Author of
'The Grey World,' 'The Miracles of Our Lady S. Mary'
etc.

'What means this Mystery?'
'The loss of the Word of a Mason, which is lost indeed; but may, we hope, by our aid be recovered.'
Ceremonies of the Knights of the White Eagle

London
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1907

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TO

MY MOTHER

IN REMEMBRANCE OF OUR ADVENTURES AMONGST ARCHITECTURE

AUTHOR'S NOTE

'LEST any be offended,' I think it well to state that the account of a Masonic ceremony contained in Chapter IV. of this book has been obtained in no unlawful manner, but from published sources which are easily accessible to any student of speculative masonry.

E. U.

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PART I

THE VISIBLE IMAGE

CHAPTER I

THE CHILDHOOD OF A BUILDER

These are the two virtues of building: first, the signs of man's own good work; secondly, the expression of man's delight in better work than his own.'—RUSKIN.

To build is a great matter. Building, forestry, the quarrying of stones with which to build: these are the only ways in which man can change the contours of the earth and leave a mark upon his transitory home, and that rearrangement of the rocks called architecture the one occasion on which he sets himself deliberately to carry on the labours of the gods.

This ideal of building, as the setting up of some permanent and beautiful symbol of our life, had always in the old time its servants: more, its worshippers. They were born for the most part in their fetters, and wore them with a glad air; being, indeed, the victims of a hopeless passion. Such prisoners of the spirit built the cathedrals, in which their longing for perfection still frets through the stone; for having their eyes set on the impossible pinnacles of Heavenly Syon, they sowed in ecstasy that which we reap in cultured appreciation.

The race of the builders is dead, and the fire which they lit on the altar nearly extinguished. But sometimes it happens that one of their brotherhood is born out of time, comes back, perhaps, from the Better Country, to struggle with the steel girders and asbestic plaster of the present age. When this occurs it is a matter of great interest to the angels, who see, as it were, a man of full stature entering the great monkey-house we call the world. But for the builder himself the situation holds a promise of torment, and for his contemporaries a certainty of irritation; for the one is condemned to work with strawless bricks, and the other to watch the squandering of a talent which might have been profitably employed upon County Council improvements.

* * * * *

There was a boy on the cathedral roof. It was very early in the morning, and the world, new-washed by darkness, seemed full of flowering orchards, joyous worship, and the song of birds. No smoke came from the twisted chimneys of the Canons' houses in the priory court, and this alone would have given to meditative persons an exquisite sense of complete possession of the hour.

But this boy was not meditative. He was very busy; unconscious of everything but the extraordinary contentment which he was obtaining from the employment of his hands and the companionship of a thing that he loved. He stood in the gutter-

way that ran round the southern transept. The leaded roof rose at a steep pitch from his feet. Against it lay an old and weather-beaten image ; a bit of blurred stone, with here and there an outline that fought against decay. It took a lover's eye to discover in this inchoate thing a Gothic angel ; one of those child-like, exquisite creatures, generally noseless and wingless, that still brood above our cathedrals, smiling through a crust of dirt and scale at the vision which some fourteenth-century sculptor saw when he made them.

This angel seemed to have lain a long while in the lumber-room of the world ; but the imprint of beauty and sincerity was on his battered features still. One saw the round babyish face and curly hair, the broken hands that had once held a viol. The boy had a pail of water, some brushes and little tools. He took a small brush and began to work carefully over the angel's hair, loosening the encrusted dirt that lay between the curls. Whilst he worked, he talked to the image, and encouraged it. When the brushing was done, he took water and washed the stone.

'That's better!' he said. 'More like what they meant you to be. Now you can enjoy the sun. Poor angel! I suppose if I hadn't found you, you would have lain in the parapet all smothered in rubbish for ever, and no one would have seen you again.'

He removed some of the hardened dust from

between the lips ; delicately, as if afraid of giving pain. One began to see the eager and delicious smile breaking through the stone.

'Oh, but you are lovely !' he said. 'How horrible to think you've been so forgotten and so hurt ! And once you took care of our house ; kept it safe for years and years very likely. I'm sure you stood on this corner, and looked out over it. I'd like to put you back, but you know if father saw you he'd take you away from the roof, and stick you in the cloisters with all the poor broken statues and smashed capitals and things. But he shan't see you ! You belong here.'

He looked at his angel with a rapture which any healthy father would have mistaken for effeminacy or affectation. But this boy had been reared in the shadow of cathedrals, and the magic of the stones was in his blood. Sitting on the transept roof in the early morning, remote from the dusty and durable earth—long leaded slopes and endless mazes of parapet and pinnacle stretching away from him like the sky side of a city—he felt as much a part of his environment as the gargoyles and weathercocks must do. Being alone, except for the broken angel that he was nursing back to life, he was possessed by the delicious sensation of homeliness which is only obtainable in congenial solitude. His hands were doing Martha's work, but his mind was with Mary ; for he was of that odd but very English type which hides behind

freckles and broad shoulders a violently romantic soul. Though his face suggested football, the cathedral and her quiet inhabitants had his heart. There was within him that old ecstasy of building—the dreamer's soul and the craftsman's will—which has long been dormant in our race.

His father, in whom the dignity of a deanery had not destroyed a native simplicity of outlook, hoped that he might become a parish priest, with a taste for wood-carving or antiquarian research. But Paul unfortunately displayed an annoying turn for mysticism ; a thing that reads prettily enough in saintly biographies, but is rightly held to be out of place in an Established Church. The cathedral, which the Dean valued very properly as a most interesting relic of the past, became for his son the home of every mystery. The sudden sight of her towers roused a wildness within him, such as other boys feel when they hear a military band. This early involved a longing to understand her strange and secret life : knowledge not easy of attainment in the library of a muscular Churchman who drew a sharp distinction between Popish architecture and its literary equivalents.

Paul never mentioned these inappropriate desires. But by one of those freaks of circumstance which the angels love to arrange for us, Dean Vickery was the means of giving to his son all the information that he would have wished to withhold. Funds being wanted to provide pitch-pine pews for the

Lady Chapel, the Dean gave a lecture (with lantern slides) in the newly-restored chapter-house : 'Our Cathedral as it was in Days of Yore.' Paul, twelve years old, vigorous and imaginative, was already conscious of a discrepancy between the wistful magic of the cathedral, her air of wise patience and covert ecstasy, and the chill ceremonies—worse, the simple hearty Sunday evensong—which now expressed her life. There seemed in these no justification of his love ; no reason for the great sweep upwards from west to east, the amazing complexities of tracery and carving that seemed charged with intricate and passionate desires, the existence of those altarless chapels which no one ever entered without a guide-book.

Now, he heard his father describe with historical zeal and theological disapproval the Sarum Use and its pageants, the furniture and ceremonial of the old English Church. He was not old enough to understand the satisfaction with which the lecturer congratulated his audience, and incidentally the nation, on the stern virtues of the British character, which had enabled it to eliminate from its religion matters so repugnant to common-sense ; but the retired colonels in the front seats, the pupil teachers, curates, and intelligent ladies, were very much interested. A limelight view of Cranmer at the stake was exhibited.

'Yes !' said the Dean. 'The Reformation, not depriving us of our cathedral, has left us a heritage

more precious than its venerable stones ; a religion purged of superstition, which expresses the strenuous temper and practical talents of our race !'

But Paul, unimpressed by this curious agreement between prudence and Protestantism, had gone home filled with new and inappropriate visions of his cathedral, alive and exultant, ministering to the faith of her builders and participating in the strange, beautiful life for which she had been made : a life that combined the qualities of fairyland and heaven. The history of her rites lit up for him now the wonders of her construction. He saw the censers swing, and the Body of Christ carried down the long aisles ; the Gospel brought in procession to the rood-loft with crucifer and emblematic lights. He saw the Paschal fire blaze up, and the mystical Easter taper lit, to the cry of *Exultet jam angelica turba cœlorum : exultent divina mysteria !* 'This quaint barbaric chant,' said the Dean, 'is still, I believe, in use in the Romish Church !'

Ever after, behind the cold recital of the daily service, Paul saw another ceremony in which the unseen dwellers in the cathedral had their part ; kept on another plane of being, more real, perhaps, for this boy than his outward life, the faith and forms of their creators. Above the flowery anthems and slightly operatic psalms he heard the solemn plain-chant ; round the unlit altar saw spectral and ritual lights. It seemed to him rather queer that his father, who always burned a night-light in his

own room, should be so very economical in the matter of candles for God.

Regarding the cathedral as a place set apart—a secret kingdom of which he alone possessed the key—he presently became the unofficial champion of her inner life; diligently sought out occasions of service, neglected corners, broken carvings buried in dust. He soon found a way by which he might enter very early in the morning, surprise her alone, talk to her undisturbed, and participate in the lovely moment that buildings have, and their true lovers can sometimes share, when they come back from the hidden world of darkness and stand for a while on the edge of the new day. It was thus that he had come on this morning, and on many that had preceded it; anxious, as he expressed it, to forestall 'the rotters with guide-books, who always asked the dates of things.'

Presently he left the angel, lay down on his back in the gutterway, and thrust his head and part of his body through a fretted aperture of the parapet, jamming his legs firmly between the cusps. As in all born workmen, his ardours were combined with common-sense. There he became absorbed in the contemplation of something in the hollowed under surface of the coping-stone immediately above his head; something which shut out all sense of his position and memory of the distant earth. Hence he did not know that his solitude had been broken; that someone had come out of the verger's cottage

which faced the transept, and was now gazing anxiously at what seemed on first sight to be a blue serge gargoyle, but was ultimately recognisable as a living boy.

Paul, in his catalogue of possible disturbances, had hitherto taken little account of vergers. They were stout and tedious persons who seldom appeared before eight o'clock. But it happened that on this morning a new verger entered on his office : a consumptive enthusiast, who would have been called cultured had he been a gentleman, and absurdly superior to his station had he been a working man. His name was Rogers ; he was forty years of age ; and ill-health had driven him from the local draper's, which he detested, to the cathedral, which he had long and secretly loved.

'No cotton-backed velveteens and farthing change,' he was accustomed to say, 'when buildings such as that were put together.'

It was Mr. Rogers who now came from his cottage to unlock the cathedral for the day. He was full of lofty ideas about his office, and they were disagreeably checked by the sight of blue serge upon the roof. He felt the duties of a constable to be incompatible with a spiritual guardianship. Yet this boy, who was certainly mischievous and probably athletic, must be caught, removed from the cathedral, and delivered to the Dean for judgment. The whole proceeding was likely to be desperately earthy, and had little connection with that archi-

tectural orthodoxy which Mr. Rogers mistook for the Christian faith. Hence this, his first solemn entry on his duties, was not accompanied by the emotions that he would have wished: was not even sanctified by the terse but excellent prayer with which he had intended to begin each working day.

He went quickly into the nave, looking for trespassers in each shadowy recess that he passed. He saw nothing but a malignant emptiness, very disagreeable to his nerves, and an open door in the transept, where an angle staircase led to the roof. Yet there was much that he might have seen. At seven o'clock in the morning it was still possible to catch a glimpse of the shrine behind the Gothic museum; for the hidden life which some attribute to angels, some to fairies, and some to morbid imagination, had not yet been driven out by the church-cleaner's broom.

At this hour the cathedral awaited her friend in the mood in which women await their true lovers: a mood full of the virginal magic that has slight relation with material things. Mr. Rogers had read little of the legendary history of his faith; therefore he was ignorant of the tradition which makes all cathedrals sacred in the night-hours to the angels' rites. Thither, the old Fathers believed, they descend in the darkness, that they may associate themselves with our prayers, and offer the sacrifice *in quem desiderant angeli prospicere.* It might have

seemed to the seeing eye that this great dim nave in which he stood was newly come from such a mystery; that in the presence of those who still lingered there it were best to kneel down and be at peace. The very stones still wore an air of heavenly contemplation; stood more securely founded in the Better Country than in the sandy gravel which represented that country in the visible world.

In the east, the three lancet windows stood out like tongues of fire on the blank wall. They were held to be the best medallion glass in England, and Rogers knew their date by heart: A.D. 1252, being the third year of Bishop Robert Fitz-Ewe's episcopacy. Now, they seemed less windows than actual self-radiant sources of illumination; flames, perhaps, from the invisible altar beneath. They had passed beyond the symbolic form, and offered to their friends some hint of a transcendental reality. Long shadowy flights of steps went towards them, and towards the choir, which the windows lit very gently, as if to give those who stood there a faint, endurable apprehension of the light divine. Under the dog-tooth mouldings of the triforium, where Norman work broke into Transitional, the deep eyes of the guardians of the wall-veil looked out on the new day. Smoke from invisible thuribles hung still in the aisles, resisting the reasonable morning air. One stood in a palace of dream, jostled by inconceivable populations: the only actuality that

eastern splendour, where sunshine was caught and transfigured into a perfect sacrament of God.

But Mr. Rogers was filled with a sense of responsibility, and consequently emptied of everything else. No doubt many presences were within the cathedral, but all his business was with the presence that he had detected without. He stood at the crossing, gazed hastily right and left, saw no trespassers, and at once proceeded towards the angle staircase that led to the roof.

One would suppose that in designing their stairways the old builders had some object in view besides economy of space. Always dark, generally tortuous, often stuffy, they are extraordinarily successful as a means of transition from the earth level to the heights. As released prisoners come back to the world with cleansed sight and new power of appreciation, so the victim of an intramural staircase arrives at his journey's end newly endowed with 'innocence of eye.' Mr. Rogers, stepping out upon the roof, breathless, dazzled, grateful for release, was caught abruptly to the heart of the early morning world, forgetting for several moments the reason of his ascent.

Held up from earth by the immense and soaring masonry, he seemed nearer the sky than usual, consequently younger and less official. Close by, he saw the huge mass of the central tower. It had an air of intense vigilance and vitality. Below him, the cloister, barely awake, was dreaming of its

young and ardent days, before asceticism was superannuated. Even in the prim gardens of the priory court, where the solemnity of cedars was tempered by box-trees pretending to be peacocks, domestic fertility seemed still to remember the vows of chastity and obedience under which it had been made All clung to the cathedral, looked up to her, as children to their mother's soul. He stood on the inner fastness of a great home.

At this moment a voice came from beyond the parapet. It startled Mr. Rogers, for it seemed to emanate from another dimension, and therefore possessed that accent of authority which it is so easy to attribute to invisible things.

It said: 'When you have done staring at our garden perhaps you will say who you are.'

Rogers suddenly remembered the trespasser, and the reason of his own breathless ascent; but having entered into fairyland he could not be official any more. He began, very naturally, to excuse himself.

'I just came up to see what you were doing,' he said meekly.

The voice replied: 'Then stick your head through here.'

Rogers, disapproving but inquisitive, stooped, and protruded a careful head and shoulders through an aperture of the parapet. Thus jutted out into space he felt exceedingly giddy and insecure, almost undignified. Terror and remorse took the place of excitement. The head of his seducer was now

alongside his own, and he recognised him, with amazement and some relief, as the Dean's son.

'Are you sure this is quite safe, Master Vickery?' he said. 'I doubt whether your father would approve.'

'It was safe enough for the people who did this, so I suppose it is safe enough for us,' answered Paul. 'And father won't know, if you are a decent chap. Don't wriggle; it's all right; just look.'

Rogers looked, gave a little cry of delighted astonishment, and immediately forgot the disadvantages of his position. He was an amateur of carvings as well as a prudent man.

He saw above his head the broad concave under surface of the coping-stone; a shadowy hollow, invisible alike from roof and ground. Hidden in this dark recess, as one hides from vulgar eyes the gift of love, he discovered a little procession of gay and delicate things; a sculptured frieze of infinite freshness and variety. He stretched himself out to get a more perfect view. He no longer felt giddy, being absorbed in the contemplation of a dancing goat, full of the life that only antiquity retains, and a thing, half bird, half monk, that played the pipes and smiled naughtily at a listening angel. Beyond that he saw a mermaid with ivy leaves in her tail, and then two mailed knights that set upon a griffin, and three dogs flying from belligerent rabbits, and several other delightful things. Evidently at this

point the spirit of the cathedral had met the sun, and broken into laughter in spite of herself.

'Good gracious!' said Rogers presently. 'There's nothing like it this side of Rouen!'

The boy looked at Mr. Rogers with approval, and answered: 'Aren't they jolly? I found them by accident, when I was working round the parapet, turning old birds'-nests out of the perforated work. They were as black as ink then, and all the undercutting thick with dirt. They only go just round this corner: you see, our angel stood here, and I think they were made for him.'

'Extraordinary idea, placing them here,' said the verger primly. 'Fourteenth-century work, I take it, and fine of their period; but a most unusual situation.'

'Oh, that was it. When I found the angel I knew directly. He was the thing that mattered, not making a show for people to stare at; and the little carvings were done for him. It must have been jolly doing them up here, mustn't it, so that he and the birds could have it all to themselves? But no one notices about the hidden bits of the cathedral now; even this angel's forgotten. When I found him he was lying in the gutter all buried in rubbish, poor thing. I've cleaned him up as well as I could, and he's still lovely, isn't he? He's really the guardian of our house; he ought to stand on this corner and look out, to see we don't get hurt by storms or fire. I feel somehow that if we could

get him back there he'd be alive again, and watch us and keep us safe.'

When Rogers—reminded by a sudden and piercing pain in his waist that his position was abnormal and exhausting—had wriggled back to safety and the gutterway, he and Paul Vickery were equals and accomplices, no longer verger and boy. Rogers knew architecture with the laborious accuracy which comes from business habits, and from a fortnight of third-class travelling amongst the cities of Northern France. Paul knew it, as an artist knows the spirit of his art, with a loving completeness of apprehension which reached beyond analysis. It is of the essence of real love that it should not be able to explain itself. This boy could give no reason for the passion which filled his life. As the years went by it taught him to look out from the house built with hands to the other, so that he saw in the sky and the forest the column and arch of the world. This annoyed his father, a thoroughly hygienic Christian, fond of rabbiting, who gained nothing but confusion of mind from a son who killed nothing, preferred the cathedral to the grub-shop, and came to his Confirmation filled with ardours that temporally ruined his digestion.

Hence Paul was very glad of the sympathetic companionship of Mr. Rogers, whose delightfully obvious admiration tended to develop self-respect, if not humility. They were much together during the ensuing years, both within the cathedral and

without. By their secret efforts the Angel of the Transept was repaired, and raised to his old place of guardianship. Though he was scarcely visible from the ground, it gave his rescuers infinite satisfaction to know that he looked down on them and on their homes. The discovery of a mason's mark upon his pedestal—a thing strangely made up of the tailless serpent and the cross—gave a last touch of romance to their adventure. Rogers was greatly excited. He was a Freemason of the more imaginative kind, and sought craft symbolism in every detail of Gothic ornament. Paul copied the mark very neatly in silver, and he and the verger wore it on their watch-chains; the sign of a secret bond. Paul thought the bond was that of master and slave; Rogers thought it was that of foster-parent and promising son. They were very happy.

Many works were undertaken together. Already it seemed a law of Paul's life that his hands must ever be expressing the passions of his heart. He developed a pretty taste for stone-carving, and the tomb which he made from Roger's design for Mrs. Vickery's white Persian conformed to every known rule of the First Decorated period. The Dean scented a certain irreverence in this application of the Gothic to the sepulture of a cat, for he did not share his son's ridiculous idea that the gospel of kindness was preached for the benefit of four-legged as well as two-legged animals. But he showed the tomb to the diocesan architect, who at once saw

in Paul a future apprentice to the trade of church restoration, and advised his father to send him to Italy instead of to Oxford.

This, however, alarmed the Dean, who believed that the Thirty-nine Articles implied a University career; and in his nineteenth year Paul was sent to Keble, a college which seemed likely to encourage a well-bred orthodoxy without providing further food for architectural enthusiasm.

CHAPTER II

OF THE SEASON THAT IS CALLED THE INTELLECTUAL MOULT

'Ce que l'art vivifiait, la science le tue.'—EMILE FAGUET.

AT twenty-one Paul Vickery had passed his moderations, read a little biology, and suffered the spiritual shipwreck proper to intelligent young men.

It is the misfortune of the responsive temperament that it may take from the seal of circumstance too sharp and immediate an impression; may allow the trade mark of the moment to blur the true image and superscription beneath. This boy, the mainsprings of whose life were work and wonder, had gone up to the University expecting an ideal existence which should continue the life of the cathedral on a social and intellectual plane. The colleges, described to him by Rogers as 'nice buildings, considering the date they were put up,' would, he was sure, impose a magic atmosphere. He wished to love these old and marvellous fabrics; to live their life and dream their dreams.

He was disappointed. He found the uninspiring comfort of home, its red repp curtains, jam for tea,

and general air of Protestant beatitude, replaced by a life of bustling idleness which put emphasis on unexpected places, and nourished the soul with divinity lectures that taught him much about the Second Book of Samuel and the First Prayer-Book of Edward VI. But he missed the sense of friendly wonders very near him which he had procured, half unconsciously, from the silent companionship of the stones.

Nor was the machinery of academic religion a successful substitute for his cathedral and its invisible ministry. The college chapel, with its desperate attempt at spritely devotion, even suggested doubts about the actual beauty of the Gothic, as ugly children advertise their parents' weak points. Understanding neither the consolations of culture nor the immense solemnities of sport, deprived of the material occupation with wood and stone which had dominated his physical life, Paul's constructive energy turned back on itself, set itself to destroy the old-fashioned erections of its past. These could not stand in the cold and bracing air of Oxford, where the ingenious aberrations of modern theology had already effaced the imprint of an intense and tractarian past. The love for order, for the logical relation between the plan and appearance of things, which belongs to the temperament that designs and constructs, found no nourishment in the Higher Criticism. Between the intellectual impudence of growth, and the

immovable prejudice of scholastic decay, Paul was starved.

Alone for the first time amongst things that he did not understand, he hungered for something real to do; something that should restore to a world which was rapidly resolving itself into lectures and illusions the wonder and mystery that had once seemed its dominant note. At last the unendurable itch for manual occupation and marvellous discovery drove him to the biological laboratory. There, at any rate, was something to do. He did not notice that there was no reason but curiosity why anyone should do it.

He was welcome. Eagerness and accuracy are almost as useful in breaking down as in building up. 'Vickery,' said the assistant-demonstrator, 'has the making of a scientist. Awfully patient, with a milliner's fingers and a swordsman's wrist. Glad he's had the sense to take to biology; he'd have been wasted on the Church.'

Paul, in fact, brought to his dissections the careful touch with which he had tended the sculptures of the cathedral roof. Here as there, he at first found something that aroused his reverence and love. The cutting of sections is but the investigation of another architecture. Ingenuities of construction must always please the builder in embryo, as dolls' clothes fascinate the woman that is to be. The world was now seen by him as a great museum, classified and catalogued, but still full of imaginative

possibilities; and he began to believe that science, with its hard outlines, arrogance, and general air of intellectual antiseptics, was a revelation specially adapted to the requirements of bright young men with busy hands.

But in a little while the dogmatism of science, narrow and biting as the dogmatism of dissent, caught him. He soon learned to look with contemptuous amusement on his old awed love of hills and trees, for the laws and properties of matter have a way of relegating mystery to its proper place. He admired the young, sharp-eyed demonstrators for their manual dexterity and lucidity of mind, so that opinions which would have been foolish in his parents came from them with compelling force. They taught him to recognise the intellectual superiority of a universe which preferred law before loveliness, and staked its all, like Swedish gymnastics, on a system of physical development: and their manly air of indifference towards the unseen world showed him how ridiculous his own adolescent fancies had been. Indeed, the window of the world was now so full of ingenious creations that they hid all view of the Worker within.

Fortunately, burning is quicker than building, and the transition to this modern point of view was soon made. Rather to his surprise—for he had dimly expected a non-existent Deity to visit incredulity with desolation—it was accomplished without unhappiness. True, after the first proud

moment of agnosticism he did suspect himself to be incomplete, knew that some essential part of his being stood aside disdainfully from the tidy self-sufficiency of his new idea of things. But he ignored this silent spectator, congratulated himself on his emancipation, and became as busied with the secrets of cell-wall and nucleus as he had been with the technique of the dreamers in stone.

The process of repotting, so necessary to the self-importance of the seedling, is seldom agreeable to the parent plant. Paul found each successive vacation, when he was tossed, as it were, from future to past, a period of increasing strain. His air of sharp and settled intelligence bewildered Mr. Rogers, who always expected to resume the old companionship at the point which it had reached when his boy left the Deanery for college. Mrs. Vickery, pious and gentle, with smooth hair and a taste for church needlework, was fortunately content to love without understanding her son. The Dean was at first delighted by Paul's newly-acquired common-sense, and obtained from his scientific conversation material for a course of Advent sermons on Evolution and Eternity. He foresaw the time when the lad would bring Christianity up to date, and reconcile Moses with the materialists.

But his motto, curious in a broad Churchman, was 'Moderation'; and he was rudely disturbed when he received a letter from Paul suggesting that modern science might provide a more congenial

career than the English Church. Mrs. Vickery, who was already embroidering a stole for her boy's use, cried a little ; but she remembered the youthful eccentricities of Saint Augustine, and was comforted. The Dean said something about the criminally atheistic tendencies of a democratic age, which penetrated even to the Universities. He wrote an unpleasantly paternal letter to Paul, condemning without inquiry the probable books and companions of his choice ; and another, more courteous, to his tutor, expressing a hope that his son might be encouraged to associate with undergraduates of known religious tastes and good social position.

The tutor's reply was polite and reassuring. ' You need not,' he said, ' feel any anxiety about your son. He is a fine young man, a credit to the college, and pulls an excellent oar. At present, he thinks the Greek Testament childish ; but when I have examined him in it he will probably modify his opinion. These little attacks of intellectual measles are annoying to parents, but they seldom, in my experience, result in any mental delicacy. I will do what I can in the matter of suitable friends, and trust that Providence and a restricted allowance will soon lead your son back to more orthodox paths.'

Merely by the propriety of his parentage, Paul was clearly indicated as a safe friend for young men of high principles and assured income. Even when dogma went on the rocks, he kept the flag of

morality flying bravely. Because of these advantages, his tutor was able to fulfil his promise. He invited Paul to breakfast; and there, tactfully representing the matter as a favour done to himself, introduced him to Mr. Hugh Feltham, and to a friendship too inappropriate to be desired, yet curiously difficult to resist.

Hugh, the orphan of a successful embrocation-maker, was rich, slow-minded, and devout; full of the unimaginative piety which crosses itself in church, and never finds it necessary to reconcile Christian charity with orthodox intolerance. Large and docile, with the temperament of a Newfoundland dog, he was wistfully sociable, desperately anxious to make friends. That he should become the companion of a Dean's son, cathedral-reared, and inevitably steeped in the traditions of the Church, seemed a happiness almost too great. He hastened towards every chance of intimacy with an adoring eagerness that could scarcely fail to bring its reward; for every intelligent young man requires at least one stupid friend, who will offer admiration without trying to understand what he admires.

Thus Paul and Hugh became comrades of the trusty dog and indulgent master type. There was a turn for monotheism in the Feltham blood, inherited perhaps from the Jewish grandmother, who had found the family poor, thriftless, and popular, and left it rich, respected, and disliked. Hugh had at first supposed his friend a being half hero and

half saint, imputing the rather secular tone of Mr. Vickery's conversation to reticence, and suspecting hair shirts and secret penances. But further intercourse, culminating upon a certain Friday in Lent, when he found Paul in the surprising and uncatholic company of a pork pie and a tinned tongue, discovered the truth to him. Reverence was deposed, to be replaced by grieving affection, even by timid reproof.

It was not successful. Mr. Vickery, breathing the tonic atmosphere of Canada balsam and strong tobacco, having his lunch upon one table and his microscope upon another, was securely entrenched between physical and intellectual materialism. He felt Hugh to be almost as great an atavism as his own parents; and took pleasure in pointing out that, certain proteids being necessary to the system, it was absurd to make the form in which one took them an article of faith.

'Well, old chap,' said Hugh diffidently, 'I don't want to be a bore, or come the curate over you in any way, but after all Lent *is* Lent. I may be wrong, but I've thought lately that all this science of yours is a bad thing, gives you queer ideas. One can't be too careful, with so many cranks and sceptics fooling about. All right, of course, if you're going in for medicine or electric lighting; but I notice that the fellows who take it up often go off the rails.'

'What d'you suppose you're alive for?' asked Paul.

'Oh—er—discipline, and all that!' answered Hugh vaguely.

'And isn't science discipline, you rotter? Better discipline than arranging your food to suit the days of the week. It's work—pushing things forward—finding out what the world is really made of. How can you know what life's for till you know how life is built up?'

'And a jolly lot you'll learn about that, squinting through microscopes,' said Hugh. 'Stuff about missing links and molecules, and being second cousin to the worm!'

'Better than silly legends about fasting and salvation.'

'We'll see about that later on,' replied Hugh. 'You're like that chap Faust in the play: he wanted to find everything out, and the result was he went to the devil. I don't believe we're meant to know everything.'

'That's what you superstitious idiots always say!' exclaimed Paul impatiently. 'If there's anything to know, the human mind is meant to know it; and unprejudiced investigation in a thoroughly scientific spirit is the only way it can be done.'

It is probable that his guardian angel laughed at this; an annoying thing for Mr. Vickery, had he known it.

CHAPTER III

NEW FEATHERS

'Le beau rôle est parfois d'être dupe.'—ANATOLE FRANCE.

IN the following Easter vacation Paul, to whom Hugh was really endeared as much by his limitations as by his love, took his friend to the Deanery. He thought it possible that Mr. Feltham might prove a useful buffer between his parents' hopes and his own intentions.

The experiment was successful. The Dean, who was ready to be irritated by any allusion to University opinions, found that Hugh's simple faith in the English episcopate as part of the Divine dispensation restored his affection, almost his respect, for the Oxford point of view. Mrs. Vickery was sure that he had been sent for her boy's salvation ; she talked to him earnestly, made a set of book-markers for his prayer-book, and Hugh, immensely flattered, suddenly felt himself filled with all the ardours of a missionary spirit—charged, in fact, with the delicate task of leading a still spotless though self-willed sheep back to this refined and comfortable fold.

This was very tiresome for Paul, whose agnosticism, almost as emotional as his piety had been, found itself at a disadvantage when placed in an environment in which everything but itself seemed at home. The presence of the cathedral brought back the atmosphere of his boyhood, but it was an atmosphere that he could no longer breathe. Home air seems stuffy to young wanderers newly returned from high climbs amongst the rocks and snow of our speculative Switzerlands. Rogers' kindly air of patience was an additional irritant to a lucid thinker who had just got rid of childish things, and was quite sure of the finality of his own conclusions. At twenty-two one doubts the Apostles' Creed; but not one's own power of inventing a substitute. But there was an insulting cheerfulness about Rogers, as of a person amused by the quaint opinions of a child, which made Paul wonder whether the right value was being put upon his own intelligence.

The verger, however, in spite of outward optimism, was really concerned about the spiritual safety of his pet. It was not so much Paul's divorce from theology that alarmed him, as his astonishing treatment of the cathedral as a picturesque but unemotional relic of the past. This, it seemed to him, was the important matter. 'Stick to the Fabric,' he was accustomed to say, 'and you can't go far wrong. There's enough feelings built up in a buttress to keep any thoughtful man in the Church.'

Religion without architecture Mr. Rogers found little better than dissent ; the stones of the Fabric lay at the heart of his faith. Whilst he conducted Easter holiday-makers round the cathedral, mechanically repeating, ' Tomb of Godfrey de Mandevile and of Cecily his wife, an excellent example of the Decorated style : head of Virgin and dog's forepaw unfortunately destroyed in the time of the Reformation. Notice the oak-leaf capitals so beautifully carved from life, and lady's costume with curious head-dress of the period,' he was maturing a plan for the restoration of his boy's devotion to his masters, the builders of the Gothic. Paul, for him, was primarily their servant, and only incidentally an intelligent young man.

Having developed his scheme, Rogers, on the last day of the vacation, invited Paul and Mr. Feltham to tea. He inhabited a pleasant cottage in a corner of the cloister, with a little parlour which had somehow acquired the air of being a chapel or appanage of the cathedral itself. Perhaps the suggestion came only from the careful orientation of the furniture : cottage piano at the west end, rosewood table with books and woolly mats in the east, and a well-swept aisle of faded carpet between. The wall-paper showed pink convolvulus on a drab ground, fortunately interrupted by dim yellow photographs in Oxford frames ; the nave of Durham, the north porch of Chartres, the façades of Lincoln and Rheims.

Paul and Hugh, entering suddenly, discovered Mr. Rogers at the piano, trying to obtain the effect of a Palestrina Mass with one finger. Tea had been laid out very neatly, with muffins, and mustard and cress, which the verger grew on a piece of flannel in the window. Paul looked upon the mustard with interest, pointing it out to his host as a perfect type of the dicotyledonous group. He had all the lucid dulness of a popular lecturer, and when he had finished Mr. Rogers felt that something which had once been nice to eat had been turned into a dreary tract on Evolution.

But Hugh, anxious to obtain expert opinion on incense, which he looked upon as a 'jolly idea if it wasn't for the beastly smell,' soon switched the conversation on to Church topics. Paul could scarcely pretend an interest in such matters. He took a small magnifying-glass from his pocket, and silently continued his examination of the mustard and cress; knowing that he was superior, but feeling that he was bored. Rogers looked with some pleasure on this exhibition, in which temper clearly had its part.

'Never you mind, Mr. Paul,' he said presently. 'Never you mind! You're a bit out of it here just now, with your fancies and your green stuff, but it won't last. You've bought, if I may so express it, a fashionable Oxford tie, and you think it's very becoming. But the old straight cravat's your proper wear: you'll see that later on. Young fellows get

taken with these novelties when they're away from home, but it don't make them more comfortable, only more conceited. It's all right. The cathedral will have you back by-and-by ; you can't get away from that. Just you go and sit in there of a morning, and look at the east windows like you used to do ; and then see what you feel. You should have heard the Bishop in his Christmas sermon. "Faith," says he, "is an attitood." "Yes," I thought to meself, "and to sit here looking east of a morning is the attitood that gets faith." It's a curious thing, but even the most unnatural bits of believing seem all right there. When I see the light come through them windows, I often say to meself, "Well, Rogers, if there isn't a Deity, how do you explain Early Glass ?" '

'That's not logic,' said Paul judicially.

'Perhaps not, but it's history,' answered Rogers. 'If Christianity built the cathedrals once, the cathedrals build Christianity now.'

'Ah, yes,' said Paul. 'By their effect on the emotions. I dare say that's true enough. There is a psychological demand and supply inspiring most religious arts and ceremonies, I fancy.'

'Truer than you think, perhaps,' replied Rogers. 'You remind me, Mr. Paul, of a blind man talking grand about the fools that think they can see. But you'll get over it. It's the cathedral you belong to, whatever you like to think. You entered the service of the Fabric long ago, when you took that

mason's mark and wore it ; and that's not an engagement you can terminate at the month.'

Paul, already filled with the acute anxiety which the reminiscences of our elders are apt to induce, tried to change the conversation ; but Mr. Rogers refused to be checked.

'Yes,' said he, 'there was more in that than met the eye : a power you'll never shake off. It was a Freemason's mark, sure enough ; the signature, so to speak, of a cathedral builder, that all other masons could read and recognise, as you would very well know if you were a member of the Craft.'

'Ah, but modern Freemasonry's all rot,' said Paul authoritatively. 'A put-up thing that only goes back to the eighteenth century. Nothing to do with the old builders except the name.'

'No, Mr. Paul,' answered Rogers with dignity, 'it is not rot ; it is an ancient and honourable craft. To stand in the footsteps of them that built the cathedrals, and wear their insignia, and say passwords that have come down from King Solomon's Temple—the whole being made, if I may so put it, in exact reproduction of the old design—doesn't seem rot to me. On the contrary, being a mason, I feel more a part of the cathedral than what others can possibly do—more understanding of her moods, as you used to call them—as is natural enough in a member of the craft that built her.'

At this point Paul, greatly to his own surprise, found himself interested. Our early loves have a tiresome

habit of constancy. The cathedral, like some old nurse full of too-intimate recollections, had insisted on being noticed by her foster-son; but it had annoyed, almost distressed Mr. Vickery to find that she scarcely appreciated such attentions as he could spare her. Instead, she reciprocated his own attitude of polite disdain, and turned a cold face towards him, whom she had once initiated into all the secrets of her hidden life. He wondered where he had found the marvellous companions of his childhood; for, having deliberately emptied the world of wonder, he could have no more sudden and awful moments of communion with a secret power, no hours of delicious comradeship with the little carved pieties and monsters that lurked in the arcadings of the aisles. The cathedral now received him with the cold contempt that she kept for the tourist, a circumstance which made his home environment seem curiously bare and desolate; and in spite of much wise pondering on nerve ganglia and auto-suggestion, a hunger for her affection still tore at his heart.

Somewhere in the inner fastness of his nature, a fastness which the joys of science did not reach, the spirit of love and reverence waited for the day. Its voice was not audible in Oxford, for it lacked the insistent accent of academic culture; but here it reasserted itself and refused to be stilled. Paul recognised it in spite of himself; it reminded him of his old childish ecstasies, in the choir, in the fields,

lying in his bed at night, wrapped round by an exquisite sense of safety and wellbeing. It was disappointing to have lost this, even though one had received Hæckel's germ-plasm in exchange. Therefore, as a result of the vacation's experiences, he was ready, though he did not know it, for some readjustment. It is always a difficult matter to get sterilized air in one's own home. The old domestic atmosphere, the old familiar scents, had got into his lungs, and thence had impregnated his body; even the cells of his busy, independent brain. Rogers' remarks amused him less than they would have done a fortnight before. He assumed a listening attitude.

'I entered the Craft,' said the verger, 'whilst I was still in a house of business. I found it, if I may say so, in every way of service to me: improving to the mind, and encouraging a feeling of brotherhood with all, both low and high. And since I have been attached to the Fabric I have kept it up; feeling, so to express it, that a Freemason is the proper guardian of a building that Freemasons once built. There's a powerful fascination that you'd scarcely credit in the knowledge of being, so to speak, a brother of the builders of the past. When I'm showing parties round, it's a real assistance to me to remember, "I'm one of them as did this."

'Of course,' continued Rogers cunningly, 'some have held that there's a lack of Christianity in masonry; and there's no denying that the masonic

standpoint may not be quite that of the Established Church; being, you see, so much more ancient. There's room for every sort in Freemasonry: every sort, that is, who live in a respectable manner, and have a due sense of brotherhood one to another, and a belief in the Great Architect of the Universe; a thing, I take it, that's bound to come with any knowledge of good building.'

'It's a very beautiful phrase,' said Paul. He seemed thoughtful.

'For them that know,' replied Rogers. 'It is, if I may so express it, the keystone of the arch.'

He stopped, and looked at Paul very intently.

'Well, well,' he said, 'we can afford to wait a change of fashion, Mr. Paul. You're sound handwove stuff at the bottom, once you've got rid of the *chics* and *récherchés*, and all the other window-dressing words.'

When the bell rang for evensong, Mr. Rogers rose, got his hat, coat, and comforter, and prepared to go across to the cathedral. Hugh offered to accompany him, feeling it his duty, as the Dean's guest, to offer these polite attentions to the Church. As they walked across the close, the verger said to him:

'Never forget, Mr. Feltham, to cultivate Tact. Whatever your station in life, it will help you, if I may so put it, to show off the goods on hand to the best advantage. I remember some years ago, Canon Vincent said in one of his Lenten addresses

that tact was a gift of the Holy Ghost. At the time, I thought his view rather extreme, for I had not learned to appreciate the power that it has for good. But there can be no doubt that it's a sort of insinuating suggestiveness that wins souls, just as it wins custom. Look at the old carvers. You never go far wrong if you follow them. They didn't aim at striking the eye with Gospel subjects in prominent situations; they just hid 'em under the seats or recessed them in niches and so on, so that they came on you by surprise, and amused you while they did you good.'

'You're quite right, Mr. Rogers,' answered Hugh. 'What I always say is, there's no reason why one shouldn't be a jolly good fellow; even if one does go to church.'

* * * * *

On the next day, Paul and Hugh returned to Oxford. It was a little later in the term that the demonstrator of physiology remarked to his assistant:

'I'm afraid Vickery is rather a slacker. He doesn't shape well this term.'

And the assistant replied with disgust: 'No. He seems to have lost interest. Been spending the vac. with a lot of curates most likely. Early training always tells; they go back to it. These clergy-run schools don't give education a chance.'

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST DEGREE

'What art do you profess?—Masonry.
'What do you build?—The temples and tabernacles.
'Where do you build them?—For want of ground we build them in our hearts.'

Ceremonies of the Red Cross Knights.

THE seed so carefully cast by Mr. Rogers sprang up quickly, for there were stones in the ground. Paul too well educated for orthodoxy, chilled by the shallow certainties of science, was in the position of a hearty man who has lunched at a vegetarian restaurant. He had eaten much, and felt that he ought to be satisfied, but knew that he was hungry still. Though he did not know it, and would certainly have resented the accusation, his soul was always seeking the mysteries which his mind had cast away. He wanted his old love again, but could scarcely invite her home unless she would consent to be reasonable as well as fascinating.

Hence, in spite of himself, Rogers' vague, picturesque language, his suggestion of a secret connection between craft masonry and that Gothic building which still owned half his heart, came back again and

again to Mr. Vickery's mind. It inserted itself between slide and cover-glass, and appeared enlarged out of all proportion beneath the microscope of his imagination, where it disturbed his clear view of the highly-charged nerve-cells to which he knew that this imagination owed its power. Apologizing to himself for these foolish fancies, he pursued the subject into books that were full of official histories, but destitute of magic ; and even cultivated the society of masonic undergraduates, who refused information and recommended initiation instead.

At last, when the term was half over, and his spiritual nostalgia at its height, he suddenly determined upon masonry, as we do always in the end determine on the really necessary acts of our lives. He thought that he saw in it a quaint, amusing survival ; yet he had an unreasoning, unacknowledged hope that its doubtless ridiculous secret might conceal some key to the moods of the cathedral builders, some memory of the hidden knowledge to which they had laid claim. He was attracted also by the promise of ceremonial, of curious and poetic rites. Your dreamer may do without a creed, but he always wants a ritual ; as even a pilgrim *pour rire* wants a wallet and scrip.

But when the day of initiation came, this gentle eagerness was pushed out of sight by a cold and slightly supercilious curiosity, which created, naturally enough, the elements of its own disillusion. He had looked for something probably foolish, but

certainly sincere and picturesque. He did not discover sincerity—a thing seldom visible to the critical eye—and did discover an appearance of dreary respectability, which he held to be incompatible with either beauty or truth. Ancient rites are peculiarly unhappy in their modern surroundings. This lodge was held in the upper room of a house adjoining the hotel which afterwards provided the dinner: one of those drab and dingy houses, featureless, flat-windowed, depressing, which are common in Oxford, but seem always to constitute an outrage on the spirit of the town. It seemed especially ridiculous that this dismal tenement should be the home of the last descendants of the great building-guilds; and the ante-room into which Paul was first introduced did nothing to remove the impression which its exterior had created.

Linoleum on the floor, hat-pegs on the wall, a dirty window, and a grey and undulating ceiling, do not form an inspiriting approach to esoteric mysteries; nor did the persons who were in the room strike Paul as the probable possessors of secret knowledge. They wore morning dress, and the air of amateurs bidden to a rehearsal. It was hard to believe them initiates assembled to a mystical rite. All were self-conscious, and most seemed only anxious to appear even more ordinary than Nature had intended; but there were one or two dons, stout and lofty persons, who eyed Mr. Vickery as the high priest might eye the sacrificial lamb. He

gathered that he was not expected to address them, and presently they all passed into the temple, and he was left alone with the tyler who kept the door; a silent and slightly absurd figure, whose sword did not agree with the Jaeger socks that peeped from below the hem of his trousers.

Paul looked round the room, and wondered why he was there. His position, for a promising biologist, was ridiculous; and though no one but himself knew the vague and superstitious hopes with which he had come, he was none the less irritated. His emotions were still young enough to feel humiliated in the presence of his intellect. He sat on a cane chair, and looked at the various hats which surrounded him. They were all ugly. Through the thin walls he heard the click-click of billiard-balls in the hotel, and occasional bursts of laughter; that specially boisterous laughter which has a depressing effect on its audience. The door which gave access to the temple was shut fast, but now and then he caught echoes of a voice: the high-pitched, incisive voice which is peculiar to Oxford. He wondered what it was saying, how much its owner believed of that which it said.

Presently his own expectant state, the small twilit room, and that silent keeper of the door, began to affect his nerves. He felt as if he had drifted into some dim and stagnant backwater, lost for ever the swift, progressive stream of actual life. The grey evening light robbed the very walls

of homeliness, and gave to them no magic in exchange. Therefore, when his introducer came out of the temple, when he was blindfolded, and, various absurd liberties being taken with his person, he was at last brought with slippered feet and naked breast into the lodge-room for the ceremony of initiation, his state was already that of slightly ill-tempered discomfort. He liked the language of the oath; that terrible oath of the medieval guilds, whereby he swore to '*always hale, conceal, and never reveal, any part or parts, point or points, of the secrets and mysteries of, or belonging to, free and accepted masons in masonry*.' It was easy to believe that the inventors of this intimidating formula had been concerned about great things.

But he had a vivid pictorial imagination, and in spite of his bandaged eyes, the incongruity of intention and performance was sharply present to him. The origin of the rite in which he was taking part might be venerable and lovely, but now it wore the featureless air of a restored façade. The whole matter was a play: an archaic play, robbed of the picturesqueness that it should have possessed by the absence of artistry and ritual sense in modern performers. Such things cannot, of course, appeal to a cultured public.

As for the secret, that strange and poetic mystery of the lost Building-word, the clue to spiritual no less than to actual architecture, whose quest, as he had gathered dimly in the course of his reading

was the true business of the masonic adept—this, it seemed, had little actuality for the modern Freemason. He thought of the legend of the Third Degree; the beautiful story of the making of King Solomon's Temple, and the lost Word of Power by which it had been built. Its master-architect, Hiram Abiff, the mythical founder and martyr of the masonic craft, who had died rather than betray the great secret of his art, would find, he thought, few of his ideals perpetuated in the lives of his Oxonian representatives. Those mystical craftsmen of antiquity who had built houses that, being of stone, were yet temples of the spirit, were now no more than a group of philanthropic mummers with good digestions. He marvelled at the extraordinary chance which had kept these hollow rites alive; and, remembering Mr. Rogers' sentimental enthusiasm, smiled indulgently.

But the ceremony proceeded, and as it proceeded his mood gradually and involuntarily changed, as the hardest metal will change if forced to remain within the magnetic field. It was a little thing that first deflected his opinion. He had not been blindfolded since his childhood; it was a new sensation. At first he thought it merely a crude and rather foolish bit of symbolism. Presently he discovered it was to be one of those extremely simple, almost unmeaning changes which have power to alter the proportion of the world.

He stood in darkness; in a darkness not general

or inevitable, but restricted to himself. Curtains of ignorance were now drawn about his senses no less than about his spirit. He knew nothing of the place to which he had been brought: its size, qualities, its safety even. Beyond him in the light a ceremony went on: its words, unallied to form or movement, seemed alien, occult. In such an atmosphere the foolish busy intellect finds itself at a loss, and the soul, that dweller in the darkness, comes to her own. It was her language, the language of ritual, which now fell on Paul's ears. Its cadences seemed curiously familiar, for all rituals are but translations of the secret and spiritual language into audible speech. The supernatural powers which lie at the back of all symbolic representation began, to his great annoyance, to make themselves felt. A new, eager being looked out from his mind, passionately conscious of its fetters and its needs.

Then he noticed, with surprise at his own stupidity, that the solid, measurable world in which he supposed that he stood—the lodge-room, hoodwink, and his own nervous expectancy—were not real, but part of a depressing dream: as the dreary horrors of operating-table and chloroform mask are seen, once anæsthesia has its way with us, to be but the unsubstantial mist through which we must pass to a radiant actuality. He had but to open his eyes if he wished to awaken.

As the sacrament of the altar, celebrated before a practical and imperceptive congregation, seems

no more than the commonplace iteration of a singularly poetic rite; yet, none the less, accomplishes a true miracle, brings the divine sacrifice back to the visible world—so, for Paul, that masonic ceremony which still holds for all who will accept it the elements of the antique initiation from which it came, broke down the rampart of illusion, and thrust him beyond its boundary into the presence of the transcendental world.

Saint Douceline, it is said, would smell a flower, and straightway be in ecstasy; leaving the earth to walk in another country. This perfectly ordinary young man, reared in the two conventions most cramping to the soul, heard a ritual and was at once lifted to his home. By his blindness, he was cut away from the tyranny of the earthly eye and the earthly attitude. The walls of that sensual universe which he had thought so solid and reliable gave way, and he stepped over into the real and eternal world whose faint reflection we are accustomed to call Nature and Actuality.

He saw a strange light, in which all colours lived and burned like intense flames before the altar of beauty: felt about him that silence which seems the last term of perfected speech. He saw also that incredible landscape and divine population of which so many saints and visionaries have reported under the general designations of paradise and fairyland: the true and perfect world, timeless and incorruptible, in whose shadow we play the grey burlesque of human life.

He suddenly felt contented, comfortable, for this place had the atmosphere which he had of old time apprehended in the cathedral. He knew now that some part of himself had always been aware of its existence ; that all his adventures since had been but a wandering to find this home. He saw a white road that went away from him, and trees and waters which shone with a marvellous clearness, making their earthly images seem dull, clumsy, blurred.

He wondered at the stupidity of man, who lets his squalid and fantastic daily life overlay this desirable country, so that its outlines, which were always present to the old peoples under various designations, are now only known to children and mystics, and perhaps to an artist or two. It was odd to discover that where hideous houses stood, and hoardings clothed in the dingy vulgarity of provincial advertisement, where dirty pavements were flecked with paper, mud, and orange-peel ; there also, in another dimension, more real than the sordid illusion our senses create, were radiant fields and magical forests very cool and dim : that angels, and the great and pure peoples who walk in the light, might jostle undergraduates in the quads, and the walls of the City of Sarras rise in and through the buildings of New College extension.

He knew that he was walking in the Pattern World from which the creative spirits project the dream in which we live ; that all the beautiful things he had ever seen were only the images of those real

things amongst which he now stood. He had lost the lodge-room, and the ritual by whose incantation he had been freed from the hoodwink of sense; heard only the far-off murmur of its words, and felt its atmosphere as we notice some unsubstantial memory which thrusts itself between us and actual things.

Presently he was aware of a Power that took him, and brought him to another place, or another condition—a condition in which his eyes were suddenly opened upon the meaning and necessity of his own life. The stones called to their slave, and with no uncertain voice. He was lifted up to the contemplation of that white Graal-city towards which so many adventurers have striven in vain. It opened its gates to Paul, and the spirits of its builders called him in. There he saw standing the perfect Shrine which is the image of all the buildings that are made for adoration or for love. He saw the three white doorways that are the three ways of approaching the eternal light. Marvellous sculptures were about them. All those symbols of eternity which art has brought down, like sparks of the holy fire, from heaven to earth, were there in their perfection; and others, too sacred in intention for earthly acts to undertake. He saw, with a pang of love so sharp that it was almost anguish, the dear maimed angel of his childhood, who still watched, he knew, from the cathedral roof. Here he was a living angel. He smiled, as if to welcome his friend.

The central doorway opened, and he entered a great nave. It was filled, he perceived, with that strange and ardent life which the cathedral reflected in those hours when she was alone with her secret and her friend. Each stone cried a Sanctus. He saw that the columns which carried this vault were founded every one upon the death of a saint. He saw also pageants of adoration that went from west to east; stupendous processions, all those presences and peoples whose moving shadows furnish our impermanent world. The hills and rivers, sands and marshes, seas, forests, snows and clouds, were there in the intimate reality of their actual life; and after them the birds and four-footed things, and men and angels, all pressing towards the sanctuary as towards the true end of being for whose attainment they had been made. But there was a veil in the east drawn very closely: only he apprehended the incense and chanting within, where the ineffable sacrifice was eternally set forth.

As Paul looked, he knew that he was gazing on that real and actual shrine to whose erection in the visible, no less than in the invisible world, all good masons must put their hands. He saw the universe standing as a temple, and the business of true building, the business that is done with hand and soul, as man's little contribution to the reality of things. He knew that he must try to bring into the visible world something of the actuality of that universal cathedral, whose pinnacles and buttresses

now rose wonderful and unscalable about him. The petty boundaries of material buildings, the formal churches and narrow faiths, had no meaning apart from this. They seemed the opposing and contrasting chapels which opened from the infinite nave of the temple of God. He noticed that the angel-led procession swept past them all on its way to the east. It seemed that the inhabitants of the Desirable Country do not need those elaborate precautions and places of shelter by which we prevent the supernal light from dazzling our poor eyes.

When he knew this, his business in the transcendental world was done. He came back from the shrine, past the door and its images, and lost the true light and the shining fields, and the people who walked in them. It was all folded away and swiftly hidden ; with a strange sense of loss and diminishment, he slipped over to the sensual plane, and to the ceremony, became newly conscious of darkness and the imperfection of things. He had still about his eyes that symbolic bandage which now seemed the emblem and epitome of his past. He felt humbled, confused, yet oddly confident ; sure now of his tremendous heritage and the duty that it put on him, troubled only by the difficulty of realizing its actual splendours in a life conditioned by space, time, and common-sense.

Presently, from the midst of his bewilderment, he heard the Worshipful Master say to him :

'What, in your present situation, is the dominant wish of your heart?'

It was with entire conviction, with a sudden knowledge of the dim blurred world in which he must live, and of the real and pressing need of its poor prisoners, that he found himself making the requisite answer.

'Light!'

When his initiation was complete; when he had received the grip, step, password, and white apron of apprenticeship, was 'restored to the necessary comforts' of waistcoat, tie-pin, and petty cash, and formally admitted to his place in the lodge; the lecture or instruction proper to his degree began.

Its first phrases scarcely reached him, for he was still entranced by the memory of the home-world into which he had been snatched for a few moments of life; puzzling over that other and greater mystery which had there been imparted to him—that he was irrevocably bound to the carrying on of the builders' tradition, the raising up of some durable and significant beauty in the material world. He knew himself pledged to this service. There was no escape. 'The Fabric,' as Rogers had said, would not let him go.

He was roused from his meditation by a change in the Master's voice, as he entered on a new division of his address; an inflexion of solemnity, which gave his words reality and weight. The words, too, seemed offered directly to Paul, as to an initiate

peculiarly susceptible of illumination, who desires some earnest of the secret that he is there to find :

'Our lodge is supported by three grand pillars. They are called Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty. Wisdom to contrive, strength to support, and beauty to adorn.' And again : 'The universe is the temple of the Deity whom we serve ; wisdom, strength, and beauty are both His throne and pillars of His works ; for His wisdom is infinite, His strength is omnipotent, and His beauty shines through the whole of the creation. . . . The three great pillars supporting a Mason's Lodge are emblematical of those divine attributes, and further represent, Solomon King of Israel ; Hiram King of Tyre ; and Hiram Abiff. Solomon King of Israel, for his wisdom in building, completing, and dedicating the Temple at Jerusalem to God's service ; Hiram King of Tyre, for his strength in supporting him with men and materials ; and Hiram Abiff for his curious and masterly workmanship in beautifying and adorning the same.'

He was listening, it seemed, to a builder's liturgy ; unfamiliar, and therefore heavy laden with significance. It brought back the intimate delights of 'curious and masterly workmanship ;' the old remembered happiness of chisel and square which had transfigured his boyhood with something of that light which is in heaven. That these dear and natural things should have a place in the mysteries tempered the secret and terrible joy which had come

to him out of the darkness with a rational, healing content.

Now, as he listened, he saw clearly that real and occult secret of masonry—the secret of a spiritual quest undertaken in the terms of handicraft, yet none the less as mystic, melancholy, and holy as that of the Graal—of which the lifelong quest of the lost Building-word is a type. From substitute to substitute, through rites of apparent but never completed attainment, its lovers were led to that final consummation, in which all Master Masons shall be "raised from a figurative death to a reunion with the former companions of their toils."

The search for that Word, the divine secret of the Master Architect, lost to the craft for ever by the Christ-like tragedy of his death : that acknowledgment of its transcendental quality which is symbolized by the substituted word—the nearest approach that human language can contrive—given to the initiate at each step of his progress, in lieu of the Word always promised, always withheld : this he saw now as that one great search for the mystical key, perfecting all things and placing the last stone on the temple of the spirit, for which sensual life must be an endeavour and a quest.

He held the secret of the quest, but the Word was yet to be found ; the word which should withdraw the veil in the east that had hidden the sanctuary of the light. He vowed himself at that hour to its discovery. As the chivalry of the Graal tried

to translate their pure dreams into the acts of earthly errantry; so, he thought, the chivalry of handicraft must prosecute its quest through the attempt to realize on the visible plane the perfect beauty of its archetype. Therefore it was in building that the Word must be sought for. In the discovery of the secret of right building—the secret of the old masters—the purpose of his existence would be fulfilled.

As he went back to the college, the fever of knight-errantry was on him. Angels, I think, walked with their neophyte. But he saw only the pale and ardent moon, no longer for him a burnt-out planet whose lack of oxygen precluded her from organic life, but rather the Governor of the Night, as the ceremonies of the masons have it. The moon lit a cold fire in his heart. He was troubled and excited, for it is a serious matter for a young man to have his conception of the universe disturbed. He does not expect it. Paul had caught sight of magical gardens behind a world that he thought given up to markets and roads; perceived wonderful peoples for whom ethnology could not account. The lamp of science, which had shown him the hollowness of religion, refused to guide him in this country; refused even to light up the dark places of his own spirit, where captives now stirred, where extraordinary powers of perception waited for use, where it is the duty of every mason to 'raise a superstructure perfect in all its parts and honourable to its builder.' Biology knew nothing of that temple.

His head was full of plans that night; the great, vague plans of the natural artist, which are worth all the anguish that results from trying to carry them out on the material plane. He knew now the necessary object of his life. He must drag down some hint of the transcendental temple that he had seen; build amongst the Palladian music-halls and plate-glass palaces of municipal progress something that should reflect, however dimly, the hidden pattern from which our building arts have come.

Under these conditions, the reign of science came quickly to an end. It had scarcely been a constitutional government; and Paul felt more comfortable than he had done for years when Architecture, his true queen, reascended the throne. Hugh was delighted. He saw in Vickery's sudden passion for symbolism and the Gothic arts an obvious proof that some religious reformation was at hand. It was difficult to discover anything definite on this point, for Paul had become silent, dreamy, hard of access. He was suffering from the pangs of the spiritual after-birth, and greatly preoccupied by his own discomfort. But Hugh, believing that the change only resulted incidentally from masonry, and was really attributable to his own pious and persuasive example, hoped for the best. He encouraged his friend to adopt the profession of architecture, the nearest approach to the building trade which he supposed possible to a graduate of Keble; and met the objections of the irritated Dean with

the sensible observation that, since Paul refused to enter the Church, the next best thing was to let him build churches for other people to enter.

'Anglicans,' said Mr. Feltham, very wisely, '*require* nice churches: they can't worship anywhere, like Dissenters. So really, if you look at it in that way, an architect may do nearly as much good as a parson.'

At this time Hugh spent many hours at Iffley, trying to find out the difference between the dog-tooth moulding and the billet. He was determined that Paul should not feel the want of sympathetic companionship. But sometimes he found it difficult to follow criticisms and remarks which seemed to have little relation with the rules laid down in Parker's 'A B C of Gothic Architecture.' This was scarcely astonishing, since Paul's attitude towards art and life was now conditioned by constant reference to that hidden image whose outlines he could still detect in moments of solitude and exaltation. He had at first found this abrupt enlargement of his universe difficult and confusing; but soon it ceased even to astonish him. When a kitten's eyes first open, it seems bewildered, but quickly learns to add form and colour to the furry, milky world of infancy.

Hugh, knowing nothing of such matters, adopted a strictly practical point of view, and spoke with enthusiasm on the necessity of more modern methods of heating and ventilation. He believed

in the neighbourly qualities of theology and sanitation. An interest in church building was merely a branch of the interest which he was sure that every thorough Englishman should feel in the Established Church; but he was deeply grateful to the Providence which had contrived Paul's removal from a state in which he could only be pitied to one in which he could be admired again.

It was a little later that Hugh realized how admirably this Providence was playing into his hands, in offering him the opportunity of permanently possessing—more, of patronizing—the object of his adoration. He was rich and religious. He wished to be artistic too. Paul was poor; he would require an employer; and Mr. Feltham suddenly saw himself assuming this inappropriate position, and cementing the stones of friendship with the mortar of co-operation.

He broke the news without delay; no Newfoundland can keep a secret long.

'I've got such a ripping idea, old chap!' he said. 'We'll build a church together, as soon as you've got through your apprenticeship and all that. It will give you a chance of trying all your ideas, and doing something really first-rate. I've often thought it would be a jolly appropriate thing to have a nice church near the factory. You'll be the architect, and the company will give a bit of land: I'll see to that. The governor bought a biggish estate

near the works before he died, because grandma told him that it was sure to be wanted for cottages later on. As usual, she was right; we built one street last year, and laid down sewers ready for the next, but there's plenty of room still. We'll have a nice corner site, as big as you like, for the church, and do it really well. Aunt Mary will help too; all her money comes out of the embrocation, and she's just as keen about art as I am. None of your stucco chapels; something with plenty of carving, little saints in niches and animals and all that, so that it looks thoroughly Catholic outside as well as in.'

'It would be a life-work,' said Paul slowly. He felt awed, almost frightened; like a pilgrim who sees his bourne, scarcely hoped for, start abruptly from the horizon.

'Oh no!' answered Hugh. 'You'd soon rattle it off when you got your hand in, and felt plenty of funds at your back. These things don't take long with modern appliances. We should leave it all in your hands; I know you've got taste and original ideas and all that. Everything of the best quality: stained glass right through, nice brass lectern and fittings, marble font, brick foundations, and a good big vestry where they can have their mothers' meetings and things. And all as pretty as you like to make it. We're particular about our work-people, and a handsome church has a lot to do with the moral tone of a locality.'

Hugh continued to elaborate details very happily. He saw this church as the future glory of the district, if not of the diocese, in which his income was produced. Paul, too, was dreaming over the suddenly revealed prospect of putting his ideal into action, of taking his place among the builders, adding to the beauty of the world. But it was more a hostel for the angels that he thought of than a religious annex to the embrocation factory.

Presently he said, half to himself, as if forced to express something of a vision still before his eyes :

'Three great doors in the west, that open upon the nave. The door of beauty in the middle, because that is the direct and perfect way of approach, and on each side the doors of strength and wisdom. I see it all now, and the meaning. And the Tree of Life grows about the door of beauty, and angels and wonderful queens sit in its branches ; and over the lintel, where all the branches come together, the Queen of Queens, the Perfect Beauty, that is the true door of the house of mystery and love.'

'That's a grand idea,' said Hugh, delighted. 'But we must have the statues done by the best men, academicians if we can get them, or else copies of old ones, whichever you think would be best. I suppose the Bishop won't object to our having the Virgin Mary over the middle door ?'

'Oh, hang bishops !' answered Paul. 'Where do they come in ? Don't you see, the point is to have

it true and beautiful? Other people's intolerances don't count.'

'Yes, of course, I quite see that,' said Hugh dubiously. He looked at Paul with some anxiety. 'But I hope you won't go over to Rome, old chap,' he added. 'So many of these artists and clever Johnnies do.'

CHAPTER V

THE LAYING OF FOUNDATIONS

'There is no such thing as common life; the convention under which we regard it is alone common.'—A. E. WAITE.

ON his thirty-second birthday Paul Vickery saw the walls of his church standing fierce and bare above him, the roofing of its choir and aisles complete. It stood there, empty, hungry; dominating the littered landscape of workshops, building sheds, and heaps of sand which had gathered around it during the years of growth. As yet, there was little evidence of beauty where he longed so passionately for beauty to be. The thing had the disappointing incoherence of an embryo; black and vacant windows, like too-prominent eyes, gazing out from the featureless face. But Paul had the parental eye, which sees loveliness before it comes to birth. He could apprehend the spirit which lay hidden in his stones, waiting for the beautiful detail, the transforming touch, which should turn a shell of masonry into the home of the mysteries of God.

The nine years which followed his departure from Oxford had been the hardest, perhaps also

the happiest, of Paul's life. He had left Keble to enter the office of the best ecclesiastical architect of the day : a person justly famous for his marvellous imitations of the numerous styles that he had failed to assimilate. Paul, who still walked in his best hours in the company of the angels, saw them about him at their transcendental business, and lived more truly in their Pattern-land than in the vague realities of earth, had been conscious of an immediate loss of magic when scale-paper and building contracts were placed before him for the first time. To dream in stone, design on paper, and finally execute in inferior brick, was too humiliating a parody of the angelic art. Yet this, it seemed, was the main purpose of modern architecture ; not the enmeshment in masonry of some mystical secret from behind ' the solid rampart of the world.'

But when he left drawing-office for building-shed, came to the struggle with matter and its laws, to the moment when that plan and elevation which he saw standing so clearly in another dimension must be made actual in the shadow world of sense, mental vision was balanced by practical power, and he was happy again. Dreamers can see, but it takes a workman to create. The laying of the foundation-stone meant for this workman the mystical marriage of hand and soul. Henceforward, he hoped, both would work on different planes towards the building of the same shrine.

It seemed as though the secret hope of every

artist—beauty in diurnal life—were actually within his reach. The long and necessary struggle with technique, contractors, and the Feltham family had hardened his spiritual muscles so that the outward discrepancies of the undertaking—the beer cans, pink newspapers, and expectorations of the workmen, the cheerful and practical attitude of Hugh and his aunt, the constant compromise between possibility and desire—did not worry him very much. They taxed his temper and ingenuity, but he liked the effort; as a husband in love with his wife likes to bear her tiresome little ways for the sake of the secret moments when manner is not noticed any more.

So, for Paul, there were many hours when his sight passed beyond scaffolding and ashlar, and saw amongst the earthly operations of his stone-masons and carpenters the spiritual craftsmen to whom he looked for approbation and advice. His masters walked in and through this tiresome impermanent world in which he tried to do them honour; very often, he slipped entirely from its power, and walked with them in the perfect meadows of their hidden land. Stone by stone he laboured in the darkness, and stone by stone the image of his labours was projected into the world of light. Its walls, he found, stood as solid and actual there as in this dimension: by the truthfulness of their construction they were lifted up beyond the threshold of illusion, and rooted in the archetypal world.

There, the glazed bricks and tall chimneys of the embrocation factory, the pert Old English elevation of the Ruskin Reading-rooms near by, had no existence. Instead, the clean and radiant country which these things had first sullied, then thrust aside, was all about him, a precinct without limitation; as all the Holy Land was the outer court of Solomon's shrine. The landscape of the Feltham building estate was but a transitory if tiresome accident of his infinite undertaking. He seldom noticed it.

But the moment came when this vision and this attitude were disturbed; when the future, which had seemed full of an airy, ordered liberty, closed in on him, and that which he had once mistaken for horizon was seen to be a prison wall. There is a point beyond which the most self-confident, least efficient artist cannot go alone; when the impulse and passion which started him on his way sink from flame to dull hot embers that lie like a weight on his soul. Prometheus, when he brings us fire from heaven, too often leaves the patent fuel behind. Then the matches and paper with which we revive the flame on the hearth must be applied to the spirit; the stimulus of new companions, new outlook, or at least new approbation.

To this point Vickery came when the shell of his church was finished. There was a pause, and in that pause he suddenly perceived his own isola-

tion in a world unconscious of supersensual æsthetics, and the vastness and terror of the undertaking to which he had set his hand.

It is not in action, but in the intervals of action, that the resolution faints. Turning his back on the angels, he looked out on a hopeless, horrible, inimical world; for the white and ardent love which transfigured the material qualities of his craft cast, like other lights, a heavy shadow. He knew of no person to whom he could speak with candour; yet, by the human quality of his work, a need for humanity arose in him. The social instinct awoke, to his intense annoyance, and refused to be satisfied with stones. But the world was busy about its own matters; its battles, newspapers, and games of ball. All its parts were turned inwards towards itself, and he was alone with those empty walls of his; crushed, partly by them, partly by his own sense of impotence and starvation.

He knew that he must turn his hand to the difficult and adorable detail which should break out from that shell, as leaves from the strong, harsh branches, and express its love and life; but the matter was great and he very small. He had presentiments of enormous failure, an ecstatic conception resulting in a dead, unmeaning birth. He needed some new element, which he could not identify; and looked about him desperately for the helping hand that had once seemed superfluous. It was that sense of a want, of the waiting for a

new ingredient, by which our angel often prepares us for a turn in the winding road.

Hugh, who combined the timidity of a disciple with the officiousness of an affectionate aunt, noticed the change and was sympathetic.

'You're a bit off your pecker, old chap,' he said, 'And it's not to be wondered at considering the way you go on; working all day and mugging over books half the night. Aunt Mary was saying the other day that you were uncommonly dark under the eyes. She would have it that you artistic fellows always are; but I told her it's only because you are such an anæmic lot. Blaud's pills and a turn round the golf-course on Saturdays is what you want, and the church will get on all the quicker if you take to it.'

Paul refused the golf-course, but he left his work sometimes to take long and dreary walks, choosing, with a deliberate melancholy, the most unpleasant districts that he could find; those great and squalid roads by which London pours itself out, a swift river of vulgarity, towards the villas and brick-fields of the west. His nerves were tired, and he supposed that his soul was sad. Very often it was so, for it was hard when the hands were idle to see the angels in a land which man had bespattered with electric trams and medical advertisements, with pork shops, extra specials, and dirty cabbage leaves. He wondered, as he prowled these dreadful streets, which offered little but cheap bananas for

the body and Primitive Methodism for the soul, whether it could be possible for a solitary worker to force back a bit of reality into this hideous illusion of life.

In these same streets he found the answer. It had been waiting, apparently, to make itself heard. One afternoon, staring at the mean and ugly walls as he passed them, he perceived a new building—a featureless affair of yellow brick—wedged flat and tight between an Australian meat-store and a single-handed draper's, where dusty hats at six-and-eleven gave value to a foreground of grey drill corsets and celluloid combs. The door of the building stood open; there was a suggestion of cool darkness within. Paul was hot; his senses severally wearied by petrol, posters, and hawker's cries. Here, it seemed, a builder had recently been at work. It might be consoling to observe his failure. He went inside.

He saw with surprise a very small and entirely empty chapel. The walls were pale pink. Cheap German oleographs of the Via Dolorosa almost succeeding in bringing the absurdities of melodrama to the foot of the Cross. Paul could not approve these things; they seemed an insipid anti-climax to the harsher hideousness of the street. He looked at them with a touch of the arrogant ill-temper which it is usual to attribute to good taste.

But in spite of them, in spite of the screaming children, the clanging purring trams outside

the door, he presently became aware that some clue to reality, some window set towards the Perfect Land, was also present. The air of another dimension came through that window; he felt it there, not to be mistaken. It pushed back the vulgarities of sight and sound to the plane of illusion to which they belong; poured out, from some hidden corner, a white magic that transfigured the poor pink place, as the Wine of Life can make a chalice of the meanest cup.

He looked about him; saw furniture sticky with varnish and destitute of design, pictures and images in which fatuity seemed curiously confused with saintliness, but no hint of the strong alien whose presence he divined. Yet he could not mistake that strange, home-like atmosphere; the peaceful sense of an infinite distance placed between himself and the sensual world.

Then he saw, in one corner, a white thing which had the air of standing very much alone. He went nearer. It was a font; a font that seemed instinct with the purifying sorcery of the consecrated waters which it held. Something had endowed the stone that it was made of with a vivid and passionate vitality. It triumphed in the abyss of the common life, as a living walking man will triumph in a wax-work show. In it, as in the rush and eddy of a great river, evil and good fought together; and out of the midst of this battle the strange and troubling thing which we call a sacrament was born.

A rout of satyric and angelic forms were carved round the bowl of it, with that rough brilliance which shows the great brain behind the hasty hand. Pan and his fauns, tutelaries of the rivers and preservers of the secret magic of the springs, poured out the waters of nature where the angels of the spirit filled their vials: and impish masks, thorn-crowned, half torment and half laughter, unwittingly helped on the cleansing work.

Something from the terrible and elemental world, no less actual than the flowery playgrounds of the Love Divine, had been caught and fettered to the stone. The result was a decoration calculated to bewilder sponsors and embarrass the baptizing priest; but Paul, as he looked at it, knew that he was looking at the fruit of a mind that had dipped into the darkness which is under appearance, perhaps had passed from that to a certain apprehension of the light. Elements were present which did not belong to the world of sense. They drove his spirit back on to itself, as if by some wind of God. Before the coming of that wind, his life retreated from its outward channels, with the violent concentration of personality which is the preface of all transcendental states. It gathered itself in some deep centre of consciousness, where the noises of the world seemed the soft murmur of a very distant sea.

He stood alone. Not within four pink walls, but in another, very empty place: that ground of the

soul, the deep centre of things where, as in a well whence only sky is seen, man stands at length face to face with reality. The world melted away from him : he knew beneath his feet the secure foundation of another and more significant land. He gathered new hope and strength from this violent reminder of its presence; this tear, made so abruptly at a point where the veil seemed most dense. Moreover, he was not alone in this knowledge. He had stumbled on the trace of another workman from that country ; a creative personality, capable of æsthetic fatherhood, a comrade and fellow-craftsman on the lonely way.

With infinite trouble and patience he sought out the unknown carver, following the track through taciturn verger and disapproving priest to a small lodging near the Earl's Court Road. There, amongst the green repp and stuffed birds of a second floor sitting-room that looked out upon a mews, he found Mark Gwent—described by the priest of the chapel as something between a pagan and a Catholic—with a sandy cat asleep on his knee, a Roman Missal in his hand, and a glass of absinthe within easy reach.

Mark was a Celt and a dreamer. Fauns as well as fairies had stood at his cradle, and given him the artists' dowry of panic rapture, wide charities, and bitter hates. For him, the visible world was built up of symbols, the outward life a somewhat clumsy sacrament of the inner quest. Seeing the

strange use that his contemporaries made of their riches, his poverty, which merely entailed the use of shabby symbols but left the real luxury of existence unimpaired, did not trouble him very much.

'The Powers of the Benedicite do not pay income-tax,' he said. 'And why should I wish to do it?'

From a life that had included both the revel and the battle he had come to a wise passiveness, a deep understanding of the sane influences of manual work. He brought to it that air as of a strange experience which belongs to the contemplative mind that has deliberately sought instead of avoiding the world. This gave to his rare sculptures that troubling quality and hint of far off secret things which had made itself so clearly felt in the pink chapel at Ealing. This gave him also the place that he immediately assumed in Paul Vickery's life. He stood, as it were, on the fore-shore of things; holding fast to the coasts of sense, but deeply responsive to the ebb and flow of the eternal tide.

Their first interview was perhaps more bracing than agreeable. Paul, excited and full of vague anticipations, was proportionately shy, abrupt, and unable to express himself. Mark, who disliked intrusion and distrusted young men with intellectual profiles and decided views, stroked his cat firmly and persistently, and gave his visitor no encouragement.

'Church!' he said at last, when Mr. Vickery had

described something of his work, the state in which it stood, and the assistance that it needed. 'You think yourself fit to build a church? Monstrous! Do you know what you are attempting? You are too young to know anything of human life and its meaning, and yet you presume to build up the symbol of its secret love. You are as ambitious as Lucifer, and probably far less talented. And, meanwhile, it is homes, not temples, that the people want——'

'It is not for the people that I'm building——'

'I know that. But it ought to be; for the angel in them. House that; build a shelter for its little ritual of daily life, not only for its ceremonial hours. You don't believe in that ritual? I thought not. Yet there's a hint of baptism in the baby's bath, and a Eucharist, if we will, in every meal; and where are the shrines that should do honour to these sacraments? Walk down this street—any street—and see the work that is waiting for you if you'll do it. Here is a world that has become the Brixton of the Universe; and you might turn it into the outer court of Heavenly Syon. But you won't do it; I know that. You builders, when you come to us—and we only get about one of you in a century since the end of the ages of faith—all begin at the end of your art, and set about erecting shrines for every sect and municipality that will have you, before it has even been proved that you are fit to build cottages. And meanwhile,

you drive your fellow men, for want of rightly-built houses, to live in tenements that have none of the domestic piety which belongs to a home. A house, rightly built, is a temple of Hestia ; but I wonder what the tutelary spirit of a fire-proof flat would be like ?'

He shook his head solemnly, murmured ' Bad—bad—very bad,' and then became preoccupied with the filling and lighting of a large briar-wood pipe, which gave a Gothic touch of grotesquerie to his otherwise picturesque appearance.

' But I must build my church !' said Paul. ' Other things after, perhaps ; but I've been set to that, I can't help it. It is no use telling me that I shall fail. I know that : it is inevitable. At least, my brain knows it. How can one get it really right here, with the material confusing and impure ? And yet, somehow, I think if I watch the idea, and keep that pure, the result must be true in the real world, even if the shadow is distorted here. That spells failure in English ; but its real, angelic name is victory.'

' But you won't keep your idea pure,' answered Mark. ' A woman on the streets and an idea on the material plane cannot be chaste : their environment is too strong for them. Do you remember the dream of Nastagio degli Onesti ? He saw a very black knight that hunted his naked mistress through the forest, and whenever he overtook her, he tore out her heart and threw it to his hounds.

And the wound healed, and she escaped and fled from him, and the eternal chase began again. So does compromise, that is also a very black knight, hunt the naked idea which will have none of him; and he will not give over until she is deflowered.'

'But she shan't be!' replied Paul. 'If I keep pure, then my work must be too. If I stand aloof from the world, then I hold that up with me. I shall not mix it with other things, and sully it, and try to live two lives. I am not a child. I know the dangers. I shall not confuse my life with women. This is better, more interesting, more intense; the reality of which they are the symbol to some, perhaps. Building is enough for me, if I can make it right. I love the stones; I live for them, in them; I don't want any other life, any other love. For me, everything else is illusion. These miserable little people running about, and the mess they seem to make of things, why should that distract me? The sky is over my head, if corruption is under my feet.'

Mark smiled at him.

'Ah, yes,' he said—

> '"Heaven overarches you and me,
> And all earth's gardens, and her graves."

The last words are very significant. But I like young fire, it makes such good ashes: and the ashes of the intelligent are more precious than the salt of the earth.'

'But you'll help me?' said Paul. 'You must help me! I can't get on alone any longer; the work is too big. I must have some one else who can see the pattern; someone who can execute, at any rate. One needs hands no less than eyes. It seems almost impossible to find efficient workers.'

'That,' answered Gwent, 'you will not find. You must get inefficient ones, and make them do. The work of creation has all been done by the infinite efforts of the imperfect, and the matter which you have so lightly undertaken is simply the work of creation on a small scale. Why be more exigeant than God? You had better get some artistic idiots from the Guild of Saint Eloy to work under us. Be careful not to choose strong-minded ones; in the long run we shall find foolishness much less inconvenient than an inappropriate wisdom.'

He puffed at his pipe for a little while, sipped his absinthe, and said softly, 'Yes, the clever artist is nearly always an ass!'

CHAPTER VI

VOUSSOIRS

'Qu' importe, si on ne comprend pas? L'essentiel est de faire beau.'—RODENBACH.

THE Guild of Apprentices of Saint Eloy, recruited partly from pious Bohemia and partly from the University Settlements, had a name for picturesque orthodoxy and ecclesiastical handicrafts. Its members knew all about the Ornaments Rubric, but only took a superficial interest in the doctrine of Original Sin. Thanks to the æsthetic drapery with which it veiled the crudeness of dogmatic religion, one or two artists, whose ideas of the beautiful placed them beyond the reach of the average customer, had crept into it; medieval spirits, deeply in love with the saints whom they did not believe in, who found the symbols of a diluted Catholicism singularly perfect expressions of the neo-pagan point of view.

Paul and Mark attended the monthly reunion of the Guild. There was an immediate need of workers—sculptors and wood-carvers, smiths and painters—that the detail of the church might be

set in hand. Mr. Gwent's attitude of dogged idealism had given Paul hope as well as desire. He was set on the immediate collection of craftsmen who would carry out, though they might not understand, his enthusiasms ; receive at second hand his vision, and faithfully if ignorantly fulfill the angels' plan. But the yellow-brick mission-hall in which the Apprentices of Saint Eloy met ; the green rush chairs and Arundel prints, the weak thoughts, strong tea, and bread and margarine, which expressed its life ; suggested a form of energy which had little relation either to solid construction or to transcendental result.

Paul looked hopelessly at the types of amiable intolerance which surrounded him ; at the large, bullet-headed vicars, built to withstand the impact of episcopal reproof ; the cadaverous curates, with bright eyes, sweet smiles, and queer bronze medals on their chests ; the loose joints and wistful faces of sentimental designers, acolytes who had become artists by mistake. He knew them all to be expert in religious gymnastics ; swinging wide and high on the theological trapeze, but seldom descending from it to enter that small still chamber of the soul where the ' deep door ' is hid. They breathed the air of the clergy-house, not of the heavens. He felt sure that they would find an acknowledgment of the Pattern-land incompatible with sound parochial organization.

He saw also many ladies. Most of them were

frail, languid, and adorable; with drooping hair, soft draperies, and that air of pre-Raphaelite piety which is nourished on Latin hymns, plain-chant, and Early Flemish art. Their faces, always care-worn, had often an elusive loveliness; a far-off air of passionless desire. They had waited all day by the mystical lilies for the Bridegroom, and the cry of *Quia Amore Langueo* was ever upon their lips.

But there were other ladies, too, of a shorter, stouter build; born workers, with smooth hair and no nonsense. Some looked like superior housemaids, and others like senior wranglers in poor circumstances. These spoke publicly and impartially of goose-clubs and chasubles, maternity homes and the Guild of Intercessory Prayer: but the ladies of the first class, though gently attentive to this conversation, seemed absorbed in the contemplation of some less tangible charity. Paul wondered whether his workers must be chosen from the perceptive or the practical class. Both groups were sterile, it seemed. He could not imagine one of them with a husband and children. He was young enough to like that.

Presently his eyes ceased to dominate him. He became conscious of scraps of conversation.

'So I said to the Sister-Superior, "Well, Sister, of course I know one only is the *rule*, and I can't ask you to make any exception; but considering that they're twins and she is truly penitent——" '

'Did you notice Mrs. Caterham on Sunday? I think she's getting higher.'

'Yes, I refused him, dear, and he quite understood. I said, "Dear Father Beddoes, of course I feel honoured, but you see there is Jimmy, as well as my poor darling in purgatory; and besides, I only get really excited about invisible things, and I'm sure you wouldn't like that. Even poor George found it rather trying sometimes. I do so agree with the darling saints about marriage. They knew so well that the least weeny bit of a vocation is ever so much nicer than any husband."'

Mark muttered, 'Good God! is that garrulous little fool here?' and Paul, turning quickly, discovered a small slight woman, whose very curly fair hair and wrinkled face gave her the look of an elderly child. Her remarks, coming from a plainly-dressed and slender body, seemed like Flamboyant windows set in an Early English church.

Another lady, of the practical type, who stood near her, said, 'Oh yes, if one has a *vocation;* but it is so easy to be mistaken about that. And I hardly think we should take the saints as examples in a modern philanthropic life, do you, Mrs. Herford? The social conditions which produced them were so different from our own. These ideas are apt to make religion so *literary*, and then it becomes an enjoyment instead of a discipline.'

'Oh yes, I know so well,' answered Mrs. Herford. 'And then one goes to Mass in the morning and reads Verlaine inthe afternoon, like Emma Brewster.

But why shouldn't she, poor darling ? The dear God made them both.'

There was a young man standing near them, and he smiled rather sardonically as the ladies spoke. He was tall, strongly made, bearded; but his intensely white face and something in his attitude—as if standing were a new and unnatural exertion—suggested weakness, perhaps disease. One might have thought him a convalescent footballer, were it not for his eyes, which betrayed him. They were moody, critical, fastidious, but lit now and then as if by some secret enjoyment of the absurdities of life.

It was this person who now contributed a surprise to the sensations of the afternoon. He looked from the two ladies to Paul, who watched them as he had once been accustomed to watch the antics of the coleoptera, and at once approached him and said :

'Good heavens, Vickery ! For what crime are you condemned to this galley ? Does religious architecture drag one down to this ?'

Paul knew him then for Jimmy Redway, a man of his own year and college. Trained for the priesthood, he had been attacked by some form of paralysis immediately after taking orders, and had vanished into the dim underworld of nursing homes and chronic disease. It had been understood then that his widowed sister had taken charge of him, conveniently relieving his acquaintances of all

sense of responsibility. Everyone had said, as they set about forgetting him, 'Poor old Jimmy! what wretched luck! We must run round to his place when we're in town, and cheer him up a bit!'

Now Jimmy appeared abruptly; larger, more hairy, more sardonic for his eight years of seclusion. He had been a pleasant and harmless undergraduate, full of games and good intentions. His manhood seemed to hold less amiable, more forcible possibilities.

'Surprised to find me here?' he said to Paul; 'So am I. My sister calls it a miracle of healing, but the doctor attributes it to the radiant heat treatment.'

'What are you doing here? One of the curates?'

Redway looked at him rather oddly.

'No, I'm not working yet,' he said. 'I want a job; but not a curacy. I'm thinking of substituting hand for soul, as you did long ago. I came here with Letty: it's her one dissipation, and she likes to show off her convalescent.'

He looked towards the little curly-haired woman. She was still talking busily.

'Poor old Lett!' he said; 'Not much of a life, is it? Eight years' attendance on a fractious invalid, eight hours a day at the embroidery-frame—her needle is almost as active and original as her tongue—and no relief but an early service at one end of the scale and a tea-party at the other.'

Paul saw Mrs. Herford now in a more interesting light.

'I'm here looking for workers for my church,' he said. 'All sorts of workers. People who know their job; can be trusted to turn out simple, honest stuff. I want them by the dozen, embroiderers as well as carvers and draughtsmen and workers of metal and glass; but so far I've had no luck. Perhaps your sister?'

'She is the best in the diocese,' said Redway. 'Don't judge her work by her manner; her stitches have dignity, if her metaphors have not. She did a cope for our old bishop last year. He liked it—he is a bit of a connoisseur—though the archdeacon thought it was rather too pretty to be Protestant. Of course she would work for you, and find you other workers as well. She knows everyone. This Guild is full of skilled craftspeople, though they are rather difficult to locate.'

Mrs. Herford received Paul enthusiastically. He spoke of the church, and his search for artists to complete it. She was interested.

'How too perfectly ducky,' she said, 'to do all your own building and ornament from beginning to end. No horrid contractors, and nothing bought ready made from those dreadful church-furniture shops. So lovely and thorough, isn't it? Like Solomon's Temple, or Giotto, who built and carved and painted all at once, and——'

Mr. Gwent, on whom Mrs. Herford's adjectives fell as peas from a well-directed catapult, interrupted violently.

'Why be astonished,' he exclaimed, 'Because a primitive instinct has survived, and insists on light—food—air? The building impulse is latent in every creature worth its salt, from the coral animal to the Christopher Wren. When the first obvious necessities of existence have been fulfilled—when the ground has been tilled and the vineyard planted—what is it that the first human society says? "*Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven*——"'

'Of course! The tower of Babel!' said Mrs. Herford eagerly. 'They started on that the first minute they could, didn't they? How wonderful! I never thought of that before.'

'Oh yes!' answered Mark. 'The romance of craftsmanship began with Babel. And at the end of the story, when all is accomplished, and the church built with hands has done its part, to what is the representative of the spirit of man caught up? Why, to the most architectural heaven ever invented: the vision of a builder's ecstasy. The New Jerusalem, with its twelve gates and twelve foundations, all shining white as a bride prepared for her husband——'

'"*The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls,*"' said Mrs. Herford softly. There was a new note in her voice, as of a lover telling the perfections of the beloved. Then she caught her

brother's eye and added briskly, 'I'm sure Saint John must have been very artistic. Jimmy darling, you're tired; go and sit down.'

She found Redway a chair, came back, and said to Paul, 'I'd love to embroider for you. You'll want frontals and chalice veils and corporals; and perhaps banners and festival hangings, too. Oh, and you must have Emma Brewster. She's a dear, and so clever with her fingers. Wood-carving, you know. A saint in some ways, and in others so very odd; but the dear saints themselves were often like that, weren't they? Even darling Saint Teresa read improper novels when she was young.'

Miss Brewster was introduced, and with her the vicar of her parish, who spoke enthusiastically of her taste in choir stalls. She was a neutral woman, with a flat face—all drawing, like a Holbein portrait—and large strong hands fit for the mallet. On her plain stuff dress, which escaped the artistic without achieving the tailor-made, she wore a curious enamelled jewel, the winged chalice, which attracted Mr. Vickery by its excellent workmanship and hint of ritual magic. Secretly worshipping the adventure of life, outwardly she only appeared capable of appreciating its conventions. This was her pose, and she enjoyed it. Even her name and appearance pleased her, because they were so effectual a disguise. 'The Woman of Samaria herself,' she had been known to say, 'would have

escaped scot free if her name had been Emma Brewster.'

Mrs. Herford, who adored her, said to the irritated and almost uncivil Mark, 'Doesn't she look a dull darling? That's so delicious, I think. Like Abraham's angels, who came dressed up as tourists. But she's wonderful, really. You ring the bell of a semi-detached villa, and when she opens the door you find it's the Temple of the Holy Ghost.'

When Paul and Mark left the Guild they found Jimmy Redway waiting, with an excuse, to go with them. They were silent at first: Mark soothing ruffled susceptibilities with strong tobacco, Paul considering the circumstances of the afternoon, and the workers whom he had collected. Both diverged considerably from his ideal; that high ideal of 'handicraft urged by the spurs of chivalry' which he held closely, as the only lantern adequate to light him on the quest.

In spite of Mark's advice, fear and apprehension overcame him as he thought of the tools by which his building must be completed. They seemed to run the gamut of folly, from Hugh Feltham, who took the earth seriously, to Mrs. Herford, who made a comic opera of the heavens. Unless he could hold up these variously ignorant and eccentric persons to the altitude of his mystical pattern, their hands would degrade that pattern to the level of earth. He saw now how inevitable was the discrepancy between the angels' land and the shadow that it

cast ; how impossible that the secret Word should be communicated on such a plane.

These thoughts absorbed him as they went by the river and through Westminster, and so to Piccadilly. That great street, spangled with coloured omnibuses, roused him for a moment, as her honied hypocrisies always did, to a half-affectionate attention. The street-sense was strongly developed in Paul. It pleased him to go down this wide pale roadway, between the arrogantly-windowed clubs on one hand and the affected naturalism of the park on the other ; grey sheep feeding on grey grass, the parody of a pastoral. Far off, one saw Saint Edward's tower, very tall and straight ; the warning finger of the undying Faith, raised up against a perverse and foolish generation. It was a civic morality.

But on this afternoon, the careful pretence of life sickened him. He hated the shadowy dolls upon the footpath, the cardboard houses which had no existence beyond the image which they projected on the brain : longed suddenly for true vision, clean outline, for those deep realities of building in which the lost Word seems nearly apprehended, and the architecture beyond the veil shines clear. He thought that Piccadilly, that Empress Catherine amongst streets playing honest Hanover, was but a drearily evil travesty of the high life of cities which it sought to represent. Its pavement—white, hard, and spacious—was not even made

of good intentions ; rather of the weary passions of tired men.

This, and the day's impressions, depressed him infinitely. He wondered, after all, if it were possible in this world of low hopes and illusions, to build as he had promised, with wisdom, beauty, and strength.

Then he looked up and saw the sky. Sunset was coming, and with it the hour when he was held up most securely from the dreadful creeping tide of compromise. Already the clouds were assembling to the sacrifice ; towery, grave clouds, very tall and white, floating in a quiet and gentle sky. They were so great that all London, under their shadow, seemed no more than a village sheltered by high Alps. In those clouds he could lose himself, wander away to white and pinnacled cities, build up the piers and vaulting of the eternal shrine. It mattered little if the materials that met his hand were sordid. Madonnas can be moulded of the coarsest clay. Whilst he had the sky, space, greatness, and perfection were before his eyes. It were his fault if he could not express something of its promise in his work.

He started from this dream to find Jimmy Redway addressing him ; asking, he fancied, his advice.

'It struck me, amongst all the works you have in hand, there might be something in my line. Designing, enlarging, odd jobs, anything ; I'm not

proud. I must get work at once ; we are very poor. Letty's embroidery kept things going whilst I was ill, but she has been sufficiently sacrificed. It is my turn now.'

Paul remembered Redway's remark, 'I'm thinking of substituting hand for soul.'

'You have given up the church ?' he said.

'Yes,' replied Jimmy, 'my illness knocked that on the head. Eight years on the sofa tend to rearrange one's view of the world. Seen on the flat, through the temperament of your nurse, the universe has a new perspective.'

'I shouldn't think that the nurse's temperament can make much difference.'

'No ?' said Redway. 'Shut yourself up with one, and see what happens. One's idea of the world always follows the trend of one's studies, and the only living study for the chronic invalid is the psychology of the nurse. Letty's been mine ; and what a perfect one ! Funny as well as devoted, which was better luck than I had any right to expect. But she would nurse my soul as well as my body ; perfume my nice, athletic religion with eau de Cologne ; and after a time it sickened me. One can't take Francis de Sales and calves'-foot jelly off the same plate.'

'No,' said Mark abruptly ; 'under the present dispensation one must keep a drawn sword between the body and the soul.'

Jimmy did not listen. He seemed glad of an

audience, and went on, 'Her hierarchy is so damnably affable, too; and I cannot stand a gushing God. For me He must be high, austere, difficult of attainment. Letty's anxiety to bring things home to one results in entertaining archangels in the scullery, amongst the pots and kettles of the common life.'

'So that they were archangels,' observed Mr. Gwent. 'One would think that they might cause you to forget the pots and kettles for a while.'

'But why should other people matter?' said Paul. 'One makes one's own myth.'

'Perhaps, but one must have material; and the old forms have been spoilt for me, become a sort of holy nonsense.'

'There are times,' said Gwent, 'when nonsense is the only real wisdom.'

'Till one's eyes are opened, perhaps,' answered Redway gloomily. 'After that, one can only wait in hope for the development of a rational religion.'

'A rational religion!' exclaimed Mark. 'Blessed Mary! As well turn the communion of saints into a spiritual polytechnic, and make a garden city of the City of God!'

'Besides, forms can't be spoilt,' said Paul. 'To think so is rot—holy rot, the worst kind of all! It's not the name or the outside meaning that matters; it's the turning of its symbols to the service of an inner truth. And in the long run, Catholic forms are the loveliest and rightest; all the better because they are so incredible. They

were made by people who understood symbols, knew that they were living things; nerves, by which we apprehend the other side. Nothing's true this side the veil; but the Catholic faith is a hint worth taking. In a sense I stay outside the Church; but I use it as a lens through which I can focus reality for some of the others to see.'

'Oh, stay outside!' said Jimmy violently; 'It's the only way. I think sometimes that the Church is like a London snow-storm; it only shows its pure and poetic side to those who are not in it. To the others it gives muddy roads and blinding confusion and the defilement of whiteness. A steady fall from white sky to black earth: that's the history of an organized faith. It is an irony that comes nearer tears than laughter; the ineffable possibility, and the shabby substitute.'

Mark broke in. 'That is a hard saying,' he observed. 'Poor ageing Church, weary with the labours of the saints! Is she to be shunned by all her clever foster-children because she maunders in her discourse now and then? All things grow old, and the Church no less. Do you think the Bridegroom will disdain His Bride because she has had time to become an old maid before He claimed her?'

'It's not the age; it's the company that she has kept,' replied Redway. 'The chattering, credulous, gossipping fools who have made themselves her friends. A creed which depends for its real loveli-

ness on the most rarefied and metaphysical subtleties ought never to have been communicated to the crowd——'

'You would preserve your gods like game?' said Mark. 'Yes?'

'But, don't you see, the whole theory of the sacraments is of such an airy and delicate beauty that a touch can break it down into the coarsest materialism? If you doubt, read the literature of French piety, the cult of Saint Anthony of Padua, and of the Sacred Heart; with an occasional dip into an English parochial magazine.'

'I see,' replied Gwent, 'that on your showing we must never let our children kiss their mothers, because they cannot appreciate the whole beauty and symbolic significance of the act.'

Redway found no answer to this, and they went the rest of the way in silence. As they parted, he said to Paul:

'Perhaps you see now why I'm substituting hand for soul? It's a trained hand, too. I always liked planning and making, and I drew most of Letty's designs whilst I was laid up. Oddly enough, there is a satisfaction in that, though I haven't much feeling for the use the things will be put to.'

'Ah yes,' said Mark, 'that is one of the proofs. Reality presses through in spite of ourselves, once we set our hands to creative work. The one way of approaching the Hidden Beauty without prejudice of dogma'

Redway replied with temper : 'I doubt the Hidden Beauty. I fancy the conclusion of it all will be much like the conclusion of the Faery Quene : a vague quest of loveliness that ends in the Blatant Beast. But at any rate it's better to spend your time on honest work than on chasing evidences of the soul ; the ancestral monkey running after its own tail. Work's worth while, like cricket, just for its own sake.'

'If you can draw,' said Paul at this, 'I'll find you a job.'

So Jimmy, too, was enrolled in the service of the Fabric.

Paul reached home to find Hugh Feltham awaiting him with a letter just received.

'From Aunt Mary,' he said. 'She wants us to go to tea to-morrow week.'

'Your Cousin Catherine,' said the letter, 'has just come home. Her training is quite finished, and she will have the boxroom for a studio, and go out with me in the afternoons. I want to amuse her, as I am afraid that after Paris she may find London rather dull. She is *immensely* interested in your fascinating church, and full of the newest decorative ideas. You know how good the French are supposed to be at that sort of thing ; just like the Japanese, only more *chic ;* and, of course, for a religious building the Japanese style would scarcely do. Catherine has just won something—not the

Grand Prix, but very nearly as good—for her bath-room design. Such a pretty idea: dog-fish in the stained-glass windows, and gesso mermaids on the wall, their tails pointing to the taps. I want you and Mr. Vickery to come to tea, and then he and Catherine can have a talk. He is sure to be interested. Artistic people always have so much in common, and very likely she could give him some ideas. She is so thoroughly practical, which I know is just what architects always like.'

Paul accepted the invitation. It was one of the unpleasant civilities which he was bound to show his patrons now and then. Several hours of daylight would be wasted, and he would have to talk about his work. He did not anticipate any more important result. He had yet to realize that other people's relations count for something in the development of our lives.

CHAPTER VII

THE ROUGH ASHLAR

'I do not think it was an accident; so subtle are the threads that lead the soul.'—W. B. YEATS.

MRS. ALSTONE, whose smart grey fringe and careful complexion were symptoms of a self-respecting mind, suffered much in the effort to repress her naturally domestic temperament. It is very hard for a woman who likes crochet-lace to pretend an interest in Degas, but one can hardly aspire to a salon—even a salottino—without it. Mrs. Alstone was anxious to carry on the tradition initiated by her husband, an excellent man of business of the terrier type, who had collected blue china and bills with equal assiduity. When he died his widow felt that she too must now collect something as a tribute to his memory; but, the house being already full of pictures, porcelain, and French furniture, she decided to forsake production for producer, and devoted herself to artists instead of to art.

Thanks to an inappropriately motherly disposition, and the excellent sandwiches which she provided for tea, Mrs. Alstone found it easy to

gather round her a circle of perennial art students, obscure etchers, and unsuccessful eccentricities, who felt her admirable housekeeping and diffident admiration to be comforting both to the outer and the inner life. She never attempted real celebrities, but confined herself, in her daughter's words, to the lesser *felidæ ;* feeling—perhaps wrongly—that a culture founded on an uncut copy of the Little Flowers of Saint Francis, and a mild enthusiasm for Turner's sketches, was scarcely capable of coping with Royal Academicians or superior novelists who never indulged in a second edition.

Mrs. Alstone had done her best to be kind to Paul Vickery, because she knew that he was her nephew's friend, hoped that he was high church, and suspected him of being clever and odd. But she found him, in her own words, 'rather difficult.' He seemed unwilling to talk about his work, and this was a form of egoism so subtle that she did not know how to deal with it. Catherine, she hoped, would wake him up, and make of him the drawing-room ornament which she expected all artistic persons to be. She did not apprehend any danger in the process One scarcely expects one's children to want to marry one's pets; and Catherine, who had the aggressive chastity which is often developed by the study of the nude and the constant society of busy young men, made it plain that she only saw in her mother's friends a possible, but impermanent, source of amusement.

Paul and Hugh came to Mrs. Alstone's drawing-room at the appointed hour. She had invited a few interesting people to celebrate her daughter's return, and there were several fluffy sunshades and low felt hats in the hall. Mrs. Alstone sat upon the sofa, and listened to the conversation of a stout young man who was a portrait-painter and also a theosophist. He was explaining with great clearness the reasons which make it possible to express the human aura in tempera and on panel, whilst the use of oil-paint and canvas would be fatal to any spirituality in the result. His hostess wore the strained expression which she mistook for intelligence. One could see the corner of the *Lady's Realm* sticking out from under the sofa cushion: but those rare young people who could afford to tolerate weaknesses which they did not share had agreed to lay no stress on this side of her temperament, remembering her excellent iced coffee, and unfailing generosity in the lending of artistic journals which they never returned.

The room was large and dim, carefully veiled from the sunlight. Its combination of Empire furniture and brown-paper walls, Japanese embroideries, and modern imitations of Georgian chintz, seemed to denote either an invincible ignorance or an ironic individuality. Paul saw pairs of people who sat in different parts of this shady flowery place, and talked together with a curious absorption. In nearly every case a tired and often untidy man was

contrasted with some eager and elegant woman, all chiffons, soft gloves, and faint scents, whose attitude of nervous intelligence concealed her want of imagination. It was the presence of these ladies which made Mrs. Alstone's tea-parties a success. The men found their conversation at once flattering, stimulating, and annoying; disdained to explain themselves, and liked to believe that they were understood. Here and there a short-waisted woman was seen near a restive frock-coat; but this was only one of those trivial accidents which accentuate the victories of an experienced hostess.

Amongst these people Catherine Alstone moved with the air of hostile joy which Londoners evince amidst the futilities of a provincial entertainment. She resumed the characteristics of both classes present—the hunters and the hunted—for she was both elegant and artistic; a dangerous combination which the home-bred Englishwoman seldom attempts and never achieves. She loved soft fabrics, exquisite petticoats, and pointed shoes. Yet all Paris had admired her poster, 'Aphrodite Artistique': a brilliant composition in which mauve skin and green hair had been dexterously harmonized by a blue scarf too thin to suggest the indelicacy of drapery.

Mrs. Alstone dreaded and adored her daughter. She had been afraid that the poster was not sufficiently normal to be nice, but was infinitely more afraid of expressing such an opinion. Now, encased

in tight tussore with too many frills on the skirt, she looked rather enviously at the open neck of Catherine's lace gown. Her own shoulders were plump and white, nicer than her daughter's; but one of her young friends had induced her to join a little society, whose motto—'The Higher Dress the expression of the Higher Thought'—forbade the exhibition of anything below the collar-bone.

Catherine was pleased by the appearance of Mr. Vickery. She perceived, with that heightened power of observation which comes from residence in Latin countries, that he had qualities and intentions which cut him off from the rest of her mother's collection. He was a real artist and a real man. She was grateful for his bad manners; too much polish disguises the grain of the wood beneath. There was a delightful paradox involved in the fact that her shabby and obtuse cousin Hugh was the master for whom this detached and distinguished personality worked, doubtless reproducing, in terms of ecclesiastical symbolism, the crude and hateful merits of the embrocation factory; cheerful, sanitary, and thoroughly up to date.

She said to Paul, with the easy incivility of the young and competent: 'I am interested in your work; but then, all work is interesting, isn't it? A church! What a curious idea, to adapt religion to artistic purposes! Quite medieval. Do you find that people appreciate it at all? Of course, in Paris, where art is still taken seriously, it would be

understood. There people realize the unimportance of the subject. They know it's all the same whether you build public-houses or cathedrals, so long as the treatment is right; so that no one would suspect you of being merely pious or something, which would be so very irritating, I should think. But here——'

She looked round the room. There were two coloured etchings by Thaulow, newly introduced. A copy of 'The Soul's Awakening' hung between them. Catherine's eyes came back to Paul.

'Of course, you know Paris?' she said.

'Do *any* of us know Paris, darling?' asked Mrs. Alstone, tactfully interrupting them. She knew that the leader of a salon ought sometimes to take part in the conversation. 'The Bon Marché, of course, and the Louvre, and the garden of the Tuileries. Have you ever been there for the Dog Show, Mr. Vickery? It is *most* delightful. But the soul of Paris is quite different; at least, so some one told me the other day. Catherine has had such advantages; she is really half a Parisian now, so that it doesn't seem abroad to her. Three years close to the Latin Quarter. Not exactly *in* it, but as near as I cared for my girl to be. A very convenient situation.'

'What is the name of your church going to be?' said Catherine abruptly.

He answered: 'We are going to dedicate it to the Four Crowned Saints.'

'That,' said Mrs. Alstone intelligently, 'is quite a new idea, is it not ?'

'Oh no,' replied Paul. 'They were very famous patrons in the Middle Ages—emphatically the workman's saints—and though most people have forgotten them now, their sons the Freemasons still remember the name. They are the true patrons of all builders and carvers who work for something greater than commercial success. Just four honest stone-masons who lived under Diocletian; good workmen as well as good saints. I like that; don't you ? They thought principles more important than profits; so when the Emperor ordered them to build a heathen temple, they refused, being Christians. They were martyred: would be now in another way, I expect.'

'Oh, surely not *now ?*' suggested Mrs. Alstone, expert in interrupting young men with oratorical tendencies. 'Education has done so much to improve things for artists; people appreciate nice things a great deal more than they did, even the lower classes. It is the influence of the Polytechnic and that sort of thing, I expect. Our second footman *lives* for George Meredith; cook told me so the other day. Extraordinary, isn't it ? But so nice for them !'

Paul replied: 'I am afraid that education hasn't helped the art of building very much. Your cultured bricklayer reads Ruskin and builds the Edwardian villa; his uncivilized ancestor brought dim, half-conscious thoughts out of the darkness,

and expressed them in the pillars of Stonehenge. Cheap electric bells and fitted baths are a poor exchange for the Stone of Sacrifice.'

'But Stonehenge was scarcely residential, I think?' said Mrs. Alstone timidly. She felt that she must try to understand the conversation, but could not help wishing that her young friends would sometimes talk of something really interesting, such as indigestion or the Royal Family.

She moved to the tea-table, the one place where she knew that she was never absurd, and began to warm the cups with hot water. She had seen Catherine turn away with a slightly petulant movement, knew that she had said something ridiculous, and felt that she owed her daughter an apology.

Paul was left alone. Presently someone mentioned Scarlatti. He heard Mrs. Alstone say: 'Ah, yes! Scarlatti is *so* much appreciated just now,' and saw the irritable expression renewed on Catherine's face. A young man went to the dim recess at the far end of the room, and in a few moments the music began.

It came in little gushes of well-bred joyousness; drops of water were flung into the air and fell tinkling on the heart. A voice near him said, 'How absolutely Italian!' and another replied, 'Delicious! I suppose he wrote for the spinet.' Meanwhile, the melody was tossed and scattered and collected again in little rills too delicate for actual discovery. One heard the pretty laughter of a transcendental

worldliness : saw an airy tragedy played out in an Italian garden, where there were fountains below the terrace, and azalea-trees.

Paul, seated at the light large end of the drawing-room, which was crisp with chintz and vivid with gilded chairs, watched the dusky recess in which the piano was placed. It became for him an open door through which enchantment streamed, cutting him off from the teacups and talk. He saw that Catherine had moved to a sofa near the piano. She seemed alone with the music ; there was languor and intentness in her pose. A red blind covered the window and threw rosy lights on her white lace tea-gown, merging in the darkness to produce a warm vagueness suggestive of impressionism without ugliness.

The faint lights, the restless music, began to have their effect. He felt all about him the tremor of a sensuous state as it passed over into a dim, uncomprehending ecstasy. It became active, dominant, attacked each one in turn. There was a loosening of the bonds imposed by cheerful society, a general sense of something desirable and lost. Paul could hear the chains of the prisoners as they raised themselves up towards an air which they could breathe. The world that wears suède gloves and chatters about Nietzsche was put to sleep. There came to the surface a melancholy, luxurious life full of elusive desires.

Catherine, more ardent, less careful in her response than the prudent sippers of sensation who

filled the room, had been thrown into the trance-like dream which music often induces in the unmusical. As Paul became aware of her absorption, he discovered that he and she were alone together in some remote pleasure-house of the soul. Her figure became for him the point on which all the powers roused by the music were focussed and gathered up.

He noticed—but less as aspects of her person than as incidents of the hour—the deliberate relaxation of attitude, the sudden significance of her personality, lifted by the music beyond reach of the vulgarizing touch of refined society. He saw her hands, folded together; her small fine head; the short ends of curly hair tied over one temple with a black and white bow, in honour of her Sienese patroness. She seemed, in that highly-charged atmosphere, as unreal as some woman in the romantic and musical pictures of the late Venetian school; a shape interpretive of sound.

As the sonata ran light-footed to its joyous little death, he woke to find that he was no longer solitary in a room full of strangers who talked in their sleep. One, at any rate, he had seen caught up into a momentary significance. He knew that Catherine was a trained artist, and came to the conclusion that she was worthy of investigation; that she might possibly possess soul as well as hand. Paul was a young man as well as a mystic. It is not very

surprising that he saw a woman where he thought that he perceived an intelligent machine.

Mrs. Alstone, who always found the non-conversational intervals of her parties bewildering, rose with an air of relief, and began to move about the room with the energy and dignity of a prosperous thrush. She wanted to find out whether the music had been good, and paused here and there to extract the worm of information from the arid soil of civility.

She said to Paul very kindly : ' I do hope the music did not interrupt your chat with Catherine, Mr. Vickery. It's always so tiresome, I think ; but one must have it. I expect you found her full of sympathy for your delightful work ; in fact, we all are, for it's quite a family matter, is it not ? And religion without art is so very evangelical, as a rule. You must come and have another talk one afternoon, and see if she can help you at all. She has lots of original ideas.'

' I know so little of the style in which your daughter works,' said Paul. ' But at the present moment the only help I really want must come from someone with a thorough knowledge of Catholic art.'

' Then Catherine is just the person !' exclaimed Mrs. Alstone happily. ' No one could be more catholic in her tastes. She isn't in the least narrow-minded ; she was saying only yesterday how important it is to be able to appreciate everything that is beautiful ; from Giotto to Whistler, and from Plato to Bernard Shaw.'

CHAPTER VIII

WITHIN WALLS

'I would fain see handicraft itself urged by the spurs of chivalry.'—RUSKIN.

'YOU don't understand, mother,' said Catherine desperately. 'It isn't art for artisticness that I want, or nice friends or flattery; it's something alive and intense that seems to matter. I go on here day after day with hot lunches, and Empire frocks, and having cultured idiots to tea; but somewhere in the world real things are happening, vital, savage things. That's what I'm starving for: something that gives me a feeling. We had it in Paris. There work was alive, and we fought with it. It mattered tremendously to us all. But here everyone plays about in pretty bathing-gowns, instead of plunging in the sea. It's sickening. I can't do it. One must have something real; something to spend on. I don't care whether it's painting a saint, or having a baby, or being converted, or what.'

'Of course, my pet,' answered Mrs. Alstone, at once proud, shocked and puzzled. 'But I do

think Mr. Vickery's church is a very draughty place for you to work in, with the March east winds just coming on.'

She picked up her crochet, and did three trebles into the same loop, three chain, and three more trebles. Then, having reached the end of her row, she waited a little anxiously for Catherine's reply. It did not come. She sighed, turned her work, and made three more chain.

Mrs. Alstone found it so easy to be at once motherly and majestic with her young friends, that it was rather disappointing to discover no room for these qualities in her relations with her own child. She felt like an inexperienced bridge player cherishing a trump whose use he does not understand: for Catherine in the home was much like a Japanese iris in the herbaceous border—spear-shaped, strangely veined, and arrogant—sentimentally an alien, if horticulturally a success.

The summer holiday, spent in the terraced hideousness of an English seaside town, had already shown Mrs. Alstone something of the mutual isolation in which those who pay for education and those who profit by it are condemned to live. There, Catherine's gallant attempts to capture *plein air* effects on the gentlemen's bathing-beach had nearly resulted in the interposition of the authorities, and confused her mother, unable to grasp a scheme of creation in which paint took precedence of propriety. They returned home aware that they

would have to make allowances for each other, and entered upon a curious solitude *à deux* which made the large and comfortable house seem more empty to Mrs. Alstone than it had done when she lived in it alone. She was anxious to be appreciative, and offered superannuated art criticism, an ample dress allowance, and biscuits and milk at eleven o'clock. But Catherine, distrusting the point of view of a person who did crochet, discouraged her mother's conversation, and retired to the box-room, where she presently produced a black and grey symphony called 'Stucco and Soot,' with two mangy cats and much of her own discontent admirably brushed into the foreground.

Mrs. Alstone did not mind this phase very much. She knew that when the offspring are brilliant the parents must pay the bill, and it was pleasant to be able to say, 'My girl thinks of nothing but her art.' But when Catherine descended from studio to drawing-room, her dainty and disdainful personality introduced an element of strain into the tea-parties which had once been the pride of her mother's life. With this critical and competent creature always within earshot she was no longer sure of herself. The tact which taught her young friends to give her the lead at difficult points in the conversation was wanting in her own child; and Mrs. Alstone suddenly understood why family life had always been conspicuously absent from the celebrated salons of the past. A daughter at the tea-table

is worse than a skeleton in the cupboard. She looked out uneasily on a future in which she would never again be at her best.

Even mothers must defend themselves when self-respect is at stake. Mrs. Alstone knew that her social success was the result of artificial selection as well as of sandwiches. In her salads the vinegar of talent might always count on meeting the oil of appreciation; and it ran to the encounter as iron to the magnetic pole. Catherine's attitude was that of an acid which has not yet met its mate. Her mother, with that infantile astuteness which is developed by egoistic hospitality, perceived that she must be given someone to talk to in order that she might not listen quite so much. She looked for some temperament strange enough to neutralize her child, and found it in Paul Vickery; a personality too odd to be neglected, but hitherto rather difficult to entertain.

Paul, who liked Catherine's profile and supposed that he found her trained taste and great knowledge of technique useful and stimulating, was willing to talk to her whenever opportunity offered. He acccepted her as a workwoman, and treated her as a text-book; obtaining agreeable companionship, and valuable information on convention, colour value, and mural design. He owed it to his angels to gather up and apply such knowledge as they had permitted to filter into the visible world.

Catherine was happy in the presence of an artist

whom she recognised as her superior, and could therefore treat as her equal. His curious sincerity fanned the flame of her own passionately energetic, adventurous nature. As each month took her farther from the mental discipline and social liberty of Paris, dimmed the image of all that had seemed vital there, the placid security of the great stucco house, where the ordering of dinner was so much greater a matter than the ordering of life, roused in her an acrid spirit of rebellion. All givers of dinner-parties know that hungry people are ill-tempered. Catherine was perennially hungry; for an artistic education is a spiritual *apéritif* which calls attention to the void within. Work she knew that she must have, but solitary and unappreciated labour was beyond her power. She knew nothing of the invisible watchers for whom all lonely and all lovely things are made.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that she soon discovered in herself a taste for ecclesiastical art, and a tendency to reckon time by the Paschal moon instead of by the spring exhibitions. Paul, aware that there is room for anatomy as well as aureoles in practical æsthetics, met her suggestions half-way. At the end of February Catherine bought a blue silk pinafore and a copy of the 'Legenda Aurea,' withstood her mother's half-hearted expostulations, accepted a Shetland bodice to wear under her blouse, and was enrolled as a worker on the fabric of the Four Crowned Saints.

Eight months of organized labour had transformed the empty shell of the church into a busy workshop. All day one might hear the chorus of the mallets: dull blows of the wood-carvers, and quick metallic tappings of the sculptors of the stone, thrown to one another by the echoes of the vault. There was a perpetual coming and going of bloused figures, variously decorated with shavings and dust. In the outer court a great shed of galvanized iron covered the furnace of the glaziers and enamellists. A small engine-house remained in one corner from the actual operations of building. Wood was stacked under tarpaulins. There were fragments of stone, little marshes of cement, the crates and straw bands in which the precious marbles had arrived.

Catherine, coming on all this for the first time when she made her preliminary visit, was surprised by scenes of litter and confusion which had little connection with her idea of religion—a neat affair of clean surplices—and only a cousinly relationship to any approved artistic creed. She was anxious to be at once impressive and impressionable; to feel the greatness and opportunities of the undertaking, and the mystical rather than the messy aspect of Paul's ideal. But she found the approach inadequate, unexciting. She was depressed by the flat grey streets that ran, like lines on a halma-board, between the rows of admirably sanitary cottages—yellow brick and slates, with green doors and red-

washed steps—which the Feltham Linication Company had put up for the accommodation of their workers. Thanks to the Christian interest which Hugh felt in the persons who provided his income, the company was a generous employer, and had actually fitted a bath into the floor of every alternate scullery; but the result of its efforts had been the creation of a landscape which seemed a fitter environment for the Ethical Church than for the angels' shrine. It takes a saint or an inspector to recognise ecstasy under the symbols of modern sanitation.

The wide, three-bayed porch was boarded up; and Miss Alstone entered the church through a small door of rough planking, marked 'No Admittance,' which did not seem to bear directly upon Christian æsthetics. Nor did the great nave, all lightness, bareness, and litter, affect her imagination as she had hoped. She saw a wide stone hall, filled with a pale grey light; and isolated figures that hung upon its scaffoldings or moved about its floor, like bees upon the surface of some crude, stupendous comb. No doubt they were usefully employed; but the quaint and delightful atmosphere which she had expected—something between a broad-minded monastery and the Art-Workers' Guild—was wanting. The place rang with hammering and with quick commands. It was one with the strenuous workshops of a travailing creation; not the exquisite studio of a dilettante paradise. With its bare walls and pillars of unpolished marble, capped by

shapeless blocks that waited for the sculptor, it seemed to Catherine gaunt and awkward; ugly, almost. She was not capable of appreciating its real merit: that incommunicable vitality which belongs to true building, the sense of soaring life, of passionate and patient love, of a spirit brooding behind the stones.

Two hand-barrows stood in the centre aisle, amongst tools and shavings. There was a large carpenter's bench, where Miss Brewster worked ankle-deep in chips and sawdust. The choir and sanctuary, raised on arches to a great height above the body of the church, was blocked by scaffolding. Catherine looked at it, and at the steps which led towards it, with approval.

'Quite like San Miniato!' she said.

Far up on the staging, two young men in linen blouses were preparing the vault of the apse for its painted decoration. The windows, economically filled with panes and sashes from houses pulled down to make the approach to the church, gave light without clarity. They were waiting for the stained and leaded glass of clean colour and austere design which Paul had planned and Catherine should presently paint for them.

She looked at him now, and suddenly perceived him to be more interesting than his architecture. Seen in this cold and unbecoming daylight, he seemed pale, thin, and highly strung. She was afraid that he over-exerted himself. She did not

guess at the secret ascetic practices, the abstinence and rites of purification, through which he had passed in order that he might come clear-eyed and white-handed to the work ; nor at the constant battle which he fought to keep his feet within the boundary of the Beloved Land, his face set towards the sanctuary of the Word. There is a type of artist to whom chastity both of soul and of body seems an indispensable condition of his state. To Paul it was not a beautiful myth, but merely a necessity of nature, that only Galahad should attain the Graal.

Catherine listened patiently whilst he explained to her, in an oddly authoritative manner, the general intention of the work ; the plan upon which the ornament was founded, and the consequent limitations which the artists were bound to observe. There was an absence of deference in his behaviour which struck her unpleasantly. She perceived that though her knowledge might be useful to him, her opinions would be unimportant.

'The idea of the thing, you see,' he said, 'is just a gradual approach—a pilgrimage, if you like—from Nature to—that.' He looked at the east as he spoke. 'That's the thread. You must grasp it ; or else your work won't be right.'

'I quite see,' answered Catherine—'An allegorical scheme. A bit literary, of course ; but interesting if one doesn't make it too obvious.'

'Names don't matter much. It's the thing I'm after. All moving towards *the* point—the consum-

mation—that's the *clou*, the thing that must be said. On the walls of the aisles, where those drawings are hung, we shall have embroidered tapestries; not realistic horrors, of course, but bold masses of colour flatly treated. They will represent the natural world, the outward thing one sees: land and sea, mountains, forests, rivers, fields, and the cloudland. And in the landscape a procession: all the creatures of the world—first the little humble things, birds and animals, and then man, and last of all the angels—pressing eastwards towards the light. It will be a sort of pageant of life. And then in the apse, right above the altar where it's celebrated, the final vision of the adoration of "the Lamb that was slain." That means, you see, that down below form and colour will lead you to the mystery; show it, teach it. Up above, one must have light. I shall put white glass in the clerestory windows—real white, not greenish antiquated stuff—and single figures of saints standing. All very simple; no half-tones and fretty detail and cloudy pictorial effects. Just a little brilliant-coloured glass, and the minimum amount of painting. There will be a sort of progress of the spirit there too; beginning in the west with Hubert of the woodlands, and ending with Augustine of the City of God.'

'How very pretty it will all look!' said Mrs. Alstone, remembering too late that this was an adjective which her daughter particularly disliked. She had prudently accompanied Catherine, and now

stood holding her skirts well above the ground, whilst she carefully appraised the social condition of the workers, and considered the advisability of asking Mark Gwent to tea. She deprecated the mingling of the sexes for any more serious purpose than that of mutual flattery, and wished to be sure that Paul's undertaking was quite nice.

She corrected her mistake immediately, saying: 'So original to have avoided Biblical subjects! I'm sure dear Hugh must be delighted; that sort of thing is so very low church, is it not? I much prefer the saints; one always sees them abroad. In Paris, if you remember, there are one or two even in the Panthéon, which is quite secular, of course, although so very like what our own Saint Paul's will be when all the mosaics are done.'

'Yes,' replied Mrs. Herford; 'Mr. Vickery's designs are just ducky, aren't they? So lovely and symbolic! Symbolism *is* so good for the soul! And one can never tell what is going to be a symbol of something else, can one? That's so interesting, I think. One feels the divine everywhere in the world, as some dear person once said. It's just what one expects, of course; but still it does give a homey feeling. And real symbols go on for centuries and centuries, and one never knows where they will turn up next. There used to be a poster about Salutaris Water opposite my bedroom window; you know, Jimmy darling, where the Bovril one is now. Every morning when I was dressing I

looked at it, and I *couldn't* think where it came from. Then one day I remembered. It was the Early Christian Fountain of Life.'

'Half the romance of existence has drifted into the kingdom of advertisements,' said Mark Gwent from the top of a ladder, where he stood pointing a capital for sculpture. 'The modern eye sees even the banner of Saint Michael emblazoned with the trade-mark of a disinfectant soap. Why not? That, too, is a symbol, and the squalor of the suggestion is chiefly in our own minds.'

Letty answered: 'That is so true, isn't it? The dear God really didn't make anything horrid except us. It's always our own fault if we find things vulgar and nasty.'

'Ah, yes,' replied Mark; 'it is a mistake to be over-refined. There are temperaments so fastidious that they would think the *Rosa Candida* itself a little overblown, and despise the lighthouse-lamp because of the petroleum which feeds it.'

He looked almost with pity at Jimmy Redway, who was at work in the northern aisle upon cartoons for his sister's embroideries. The great sheets of paper had been hung in position that he might judge the effect of his contours. Jimmy walked to and fro, correcting the softer curves, eliminating unnecessary detail, bringing the whole design into a severer harmony. Now and then Mrs. Herford cried out coaxingly: 'Oh, don't knock out those darling little violets, Jimmy!' or: 'Have a weeny

bit of trimming on that angel's dress!' But he took no notice. His attitude was familiar to Catherine, who recognised him to be one of those ruthless and able artists who neither defer to the opinion of others nor give themselves the trouble of contradicting it.

But when she entered upon her regular work, took her position in the ranks, she perceived with surprise that the diverse characters of the workers counted for little in the actual life of the place. Paul and Gwent were the dominant minds of the undertaking; yet it seemed that some other element, which transcended mind and was to her incomprehensible, therefore interesting, dominated them, their subordinates, their work. A strange magnetism was prevalent: a peculiar power which imposed itself on the hands and minds of the craftsmen, holding them up to something approaching that ancient ideal of knightly labour, of a spiritual quest undertaken in the terms of manual toil, in which the old workers sought the mystical Word of their art. They worked towards an invisible accomplishment, which they felt, but could not define. Some faint shadow of the transcendental pattern so clearly visible to Paul had begun to appear before the eyes of his workers.

Catherine, who entered the place filled with the insolent liberty of an art student and an egoist, was first irritated, then disheartened, then caught by the magnetism. Here, at any rate, was something

that mattered; mattered enormously to those who had conceived it. In the presence of this incessant, co-ordinated act of creation the life of the isolated artist appeared curiously futile and meaningless; a subtle game.

Paul here took, without arrogance or hesitation, the astonishing position of master. He gave peremptory orders, assuming in others the fervour of obedience which lit his own life; and Catherine found herself obeying with the peculiar zeal of a neophyte in the art of servitude. She felt delightfully busy and competent, working day by day upon the cartoons for the clerestory windows amongst a litter of paper, charcoal and samples of coloured glass. She approved the hive-like activity of the scattered workers: Emma Brewster at her carving bench, a block of oak clamped firmly before her, the mallet falling in regular beats; Mark Gwent, hung between the floor and vault, chipping away the stone that hid his intricate fancies from sight.

Because he was strong and strange, and she avid of new impressions, Mark quickly became Catherine's dominant influence. He had a manner by turns courtly and dogmatic, and a method of conversation which ranged easily from Bohemia to the Empyrean Heaven. To Miss Alstone, deeply dyed with the rigid unconventionalities of the Parisian studios, this all made for amazement. Thanks to his paradoxes, his fervours and intolerances, she saw the brain of mankind in new perspective.

Between the taps of his mason's mallet, as he brought into relief the rings of bowed and sexless bearers of incense and lights with which the pillars of the sanctuary were crowned, Mr. Gwent told her much of Paul and of his aims, with a rich vagueness which could not but intoxicate an imagination nourished on that æsthetic materialism which is the mainstay of modern art.

'Vickery,' he said, 'is not here at all, as you would count here. He is working for something on the other side, where his real life is lived; and making this side, the common life and common workers in it, minister to the secret adventure of his soul. Oh yes! that is really so. You don't believe in other sides, perhaps? Very sensible of you. "The simple faith, the single eye." The eye without the faith is rather fashionable just now. But there are people, and Vickery is one of them, who can't really enjoy that position. They know, unfortunately. They have looked out through one of the loopholes in the wall of Appearance. There are plenty of those left, you know—yes, and doors as well as loopholes for the more daring explorers—in spite of all the careful blocking up that has been going on lately. People stuff them up with mud and newspaper, and then pretend that they are not there. You see, they are at inconvenient levels. They demand in their users either humility or exaltation; horribly morbid qualities, which no one cares to possess. So most of us live on very happily in our comfort-

able City of Sense; and pretend that there are no walls, and no realities but those of our own building. Much the best plan, is it not? I was sure that you would think so. It would be all right if it were not that sometimes night-cries come out of the uncharted country, and disturb the townsfolk in their nice hygienic beds. But that isn't likely to happen very often in a country which is safeguarded by a taste for musical comedy and the Protestant succession.'

'That's very odd and very interesting,' said Catherine alertly. 'How fashionable these occult ideas have become lately, haven't they? Of course, I saw at once that Mr. Vickery had rather unusual views; but that is so often the case with artistic people, is it not?'

'Vickery has not got views; he has *the* view,' replied Mark. 'Oh yes! There is only one that really matters, and it is always there for those who care to look out on it. Of course, if you prefer to look the other way, you never see it; one pair of eyes can't look two ways at once. Our train rushes between the countries of Appearance and Reality, and we can choose which window we will see out of, like any other excursionists. Most of us gaze sedulously out of the window which gives on to the country of Appearance, and tabulate the results very neatly indeed. But what about the windows on the other side of the train? And on what unimaginable landscape may not they look out?'

'That's quite true,' said Catherine. 'I'm per-

fectly certain that symbolists and persons of that kind do really see a different world from the genuine realistic painters. They get all the values wrong, but nothing will convince them of it. Think of Arnold Boecklin or Burne-Jones, or even Puvis de Chavannes. Their world isn't a bit the same as Cézanne's or Sargent's. What you mean is the difference between reality and imagination.'

'It might be, perhaps,' said Mark, 'if imagination did not happen to be reality. What *you* call reality never touches the real at all; it's a funny illusion that rests in the merely material. But the imaginative artist, as you call him, goes on past those visible manifestations to something actual; just as those excursionists we spoke of will enter the Continuing City when they leave the railway-train. So it's better policy really—more practical—to make a poor sketch of the Delectable Mountains, than a perfect portrait of the fur on a motorist's coat.'

'Not necessarily. Fur is very good practice. It's difficult, and it takes interesting lights. Mere subject doesn't matter; it's all in the treatment.'

'The soul that sees the subject matters,' said Mark; 'And the love that is born of it, and the creative effort of that love. That's all that does matter, perhaps.'

'Sentimentalists never do strong work.'

'The loveless do none at all: none that has any importance. They are blind, poor brutes! Lovers are the only people who see anything, you know. Look at Vickery, and at Mrs. Herford. True lovers both of them——'

'Letty! Ridiculous!'

'They often are,' answered Gwent. 'Oh yes! Vickery loves his stones, serves them, I don't doubt, with blood and tears; and because he loves them, he sees beyond them——'

'I don't see how——'

'——Cold things to love, you think? Rather hard and unresponsive? All the better! Love and spend yourself; what more do you want? Spend and suffer: suffer and spend. That's the evening and the morning of the lover's day. And remember that six lover's days—the Infinite Lover brooding over the finite beloved—sufficed for the whole work of creation.'

Catherine, confused by this sudden appeal to a Book that she could scarcely take seriously, did not answer. Presently Mark said kindly:

'You think that this talk would be silly if it were not so eccentric, don't you? Never mind. You have a nice clean technique, which is all we want of you. The convention of that seraph is excellent.'

Catherine was saved from mortification by her conviction that men only talked to intelligent women like this. She perceived that Mark walked with assurance in countries whose existence she had never suspected: countries which were probably full of suggestion for the serious student of design. Knowing that the most unnatural way of seeing things is often the most artistic, she strained her eyes to catch a glimpse of its frontiers; but without success. Mr. Gwent's observation that 'lovers are

the only people who see anything ' came often to her mind ; and, remembering the conspicuous success with which a certain type of Parisian student paints the life of the *coulisses*, she acknowledged that it might at any rate be approximately true.

But it threw no light on Paul Vickery's character or powers. There was nothing that she could call lover-like in his attitude towards either assistants or stones. He was a taciturn master, a quick and accurate craftsman. She had supposed him deeply religious : a Fra Angelico in Irish tweed, dreaming of some flat and flowery heaven where saintly bishops and emaciated martyrs praised God according to the Latin Use. But on the day when she heard him say quickly to the clumsy and argumentative Hugh, 'Oh, damn dogma! Watch your tool. You're here to hammer metal, not spin creeds!' a new and puzzling light was cast upon her mind.

It was difficult even for a clever girl, held in spite of herself to the crowded and tangible world of space and time, to identify this skilled, opinionated, and sometimes rough-tongued workman with that captain of a more transcendental industry whom Mark described. He at last became for her one of those persons whose real strangeness consists in being so much more ordinary than one would have expected. The use of umbrellas or strong language seemed equally unnatural in him. It was incredible that a man who had enjoyed the super-sensual revelation should have a preference in cheese.

CHAPTER IX

THE CHALICE

'Our Works are the mirror wherein the spirit first sees its natural lineaments.'—CARLYLE.

WHEN summer came, the works had made great progress. In the eastern chapel, the cutting and painting of the clerestory glass had begun. Adoring Powers and Dominations could be seen in faint outline upon the apse. Redway, having finished the first designs for his sister's tapestries, had turned his attention to altar plate.

There is a poignant significance in small work and small events, which makes them the truest and tersest interpreters of life. They concentrate essential meanings within narrow compass. It is this, rather than mere rarity, which gives to jewels their secret and peculiar power. Mountains of loadstone are rarer than diamonds; but they have less attractive force.

Jimmy Redway, entering on his duties in a mood of workmanlike detachment, was surprised to find in them a living spirit which rose to struggle with his own. The interest which he had taken in the tapes-

tries had been cool, industrial, artistic. The large ness of the thing, the physical labour it involved, had lulled his fretful brain; helping him to forget at once his frustrated virility and his broken priesthood. Letty's interruptions, Paul's supervision, the presence, movement, and technical conversation of the other workers, induced the warm and social sense of concerted labour which leaves no room for individual meditation.

Now, he spent his day alone in the enamelling-shed, intent upon experimental patterns, contours, delicate measurements, and fine tracings: at once the poetry and mathematics of handicraft. The thorny branches that should strengthen the bowl of the chalice, guarding the secret wine; the dreamy, mystical lines which he outlined upon the paten—symbols, perhaps, of some long dim pilgrimage, intricate search and endeavour for those who were nourished by the angels' bread—filled his objective world. Thus it presently happened that their voice, the voice which is known to every solitary worker, broke the silence and filled his ears.

Jimmy was a strong, efficient draughtsman: he impressed his mind upon his work. But once that work began to live, it turned, like a benevolent monster upon a fastidious Frankenstein, and insisted on impressing its message upon him. He could not work for long upon the designing of the chalice without some old sense of its awful significance coming back to his mind. All his past life,

and the wreck of creed which he wished to think unimportant and amusing, were present to him under this symbol. It seemed as though occult meanings, far transcending orthodox dogma, were bound up in its very shape : the mystical wine of the Graal, that cup of initiation, which is the desirable end of all quests. He saw, beyond churches and creeds, the outline of some dim mystery ; and of a secret cup that was withheld from his lips. Yet when the lines fell true and the passion of right work possessed him, he felt that the Guardian of the chalice drew near.

He was not always alone. Miss Brewster stopped sometimes at the door of the enamelling-shed for conversation or advice. She liked its atmosphere : the air of alchemy, the fusion of physics and fine taste. The muffle furnace, a little fiery cave like the mouth of some veritable medieval hell ; the sudden violent flame of the blow-pipe ; the work-table, with its pestle, mortar, acids, salts, and glass jars full of strangely-coloured powders ; might have served as a background for the *magnum opus*. Redway's pretended common-sense and violent refusal of reality were piquant in such a place ; and Emma took an evil delight in probing and investigating the corners of his unhappy and fastidious spirit. Your true adventurer cannot mind her own business, for trespassing is of the essence of exploration. Jimmy liked her, because she was a quiet and baffling woman who withheld more than she

gave. It pleased him to credit her with a stern, rationalistic temper, disillusioned and industrious: the complement, he fancied, of his own.

There was one hot afternoon when she stopped at the door to say to him: 'Be ready with the drawings for the chalice enamels to-night. Mr. Vickery and Miss Alstone are coming to fire a trial piece.'

'That beastly girl,' said Jimmy, 'has a hand in everything; glass, fresco, even Gwent's sculptures. And now enamels!'

'She's a good artist, well trained. We need her.'

'Yes; but she's not *it*,' answered Redway impatiently. 'She's detached, restless, a disturbing influence. In some ways she is stronger than we are; stronger for herself, just as a wild animal is stronger. I don't trust her. What's she hunting for: what's she wanting?'

'What are we all hunting for?' said Emma. 'It's all stress and strain here, isn't it? Each in search of our "separate star." Don't quarrel with her for that.'

'It's a pest. One wants peace.'

'It's what keeps the work honest and good. I like watching all the different forces that are struggling in this place—the loves and ambitions and egotisms and pieties—and that wild passion of Mr. Vickery's holding them all; yes, even Miss Alstone, more or less; and forcing them into the path that he has traced. Here, at any rate, *omnis creatura ingemiscit et parturit*. He's fighting his way

somewhere, aiming at something. Don't you feel the pull of that ? I do ! But Miss Alstone doesn't pull true, and that is why she is dangerous.'

'I sometimes think it is Vickery that she wants, is hunting.'

'Oh, impossible ! As well fall in love with a dynamo,' said Emma quickly. She added very naturally : 'He mustn't be touched : all his value for us would be gone. He is beyond all that.'

'She isn't !'

'Perhaps not. But she only wants an intoxicant ; just as you want an anæsthetic. She doesn't know yet where to find it, and grabs at everything that attracts her ; like a woman at a remnant sale, snatching at chiffons which she does not know how to use.'

Redway looked at her rather superciliously. 'And you,' he said, 'Can you utilize spiritual chiffons to advantage ? Where does your hunting come in ?'

'Oh, I don't hunt,' answered Emma briskly ; 'I enjoy. I'm not one of the hungry ones, like you and Miss Alstone, always seeking to earn the bread of the soul by the sweat of the brow. I eat twice in the twenty-four hours, and take my Dante lecture punctually at eight on Fridays : a spare but sufficient diet, with no risk of spiritual dyspepsia. The rest of the time I live, and watch others living.'

'A cruel pleasure.'

'A divine one ! If cruelty is there, it's meant for us, I suppose, as well as the amiable amusements. Don't you feel sometimes as if you must stretch

your arms and cry out to life—all life, all the experience there is, from High Mass to cock-fighting—to come to you ? I like to savour it all : all the passion, loveliness, and complexity that its Creator sees, the obscene and the divine.'

'I know,' said Redway slowly. 'But when you savour it, hasn't it a bitter taste ?'

'Of course, like all tonics. But then, I'm one of those who prefer the olives of Gethsemane to the chocolate creams of the Crèche : a theological *gourmet*. I think even the beauty of the devil far more inspiring than the ugliness of the orthodox ; more heaven in it, somehow. My God, you know, isn't a capricious Lord of the Harvest, like Mr. Feltham's, who must be propitiated by lining the altar rails with vegetable marrows. He is an artist —a ruthless artist—creating, maiming, slaying, for beauty's sake. Only such a Maker could have contrived this wonderful theatre of the world that I enjoy so much. No mere amiable lover of prettiness, presenting a shadowless, insipid show. His artistic triumphs are often tragedies : but triumphs none the less.'

'For the actors ?'

'Oh, we must take our turns in the cast. It's only a stock company, after all, with frequent retirements and recruits. But we get as good as we give. No one understands that. They say, "How cruel to let pain happen, and death !" But pain and death are beautiful, cruelly beautiful, for those

who look on. That is what is meant when it is said that the angels rejoice when we weep.'

'Enjoy themselves at our expense! I have long suspected them of it, though it's hardly an ethical conception.'

'Who cares? There are other things besides ethics. Beauty, for instance, is far harder to compass; as far beyond goodness as genius is beyond talent. God is only good in one aspect; quite often it is enough for Him to be beautiful. Look at Nature. Good? Not a bit of it: the one thing that is never called good-natured. Tigers: what about their morals? But look at their shape!

'"Did He who made the lamb make thee?"

Heavens! What a question! Of course He did, because He is an all-beautiful God, not a bishop.'

'And where do you connect the Designer of the tiger with the Deity of British domestic sentiment?'

'Need one confuse the Creator with the cult?'

'Yes!' said Jimmy; 'One need! A worker is judged by his output. The mere existence of domestic sentiment—all the squalor and foolishness, the prostitution of poetic things, all the damnable, ugly, absurd detail of life—how do you reconcile that with your Artist?'

'Why, grotesques!' said Emma. 'It would be very tame without them. We use devils, fooleries, anything we like, to enrich *our* forms, give life, variety, interest; and why shouldn't He? They kill the cold, classical quality of measured and

balanced construction. I'm sure He enjoys making them as much as I do. An astronomical universe is unendurable, so chilly and neat, till one remembers that it contains impossible orchids, and colds in the head, and gramophones, and short-skirted, self-satisfied mothers of dough-faced twins. It's all those teeming, ludicrous, inchoate shapes that make up the wonder and vitality of the Gothic ; and the Gothic is only an epitome of the world. They are an aspect of actual beauty, too, though rather a confusing one for the pious materialists.'

She approached Redway, and looked over his shoulder. He was drawing a border of plaited thorns for the brim of the cup. He frowned as he worked.

' Your spines are full of vitality !' she said.

When she left him, Jimmy turned to his work ; laying the lines with freedom and savageness, as if they were pioneer blows upon the evil and imprisoning thicket of ' the wood behind the world.' It was a hot afternoon. The enclosed and sultry place, the solitude, broken by the distant tapping of masons at work upon the church, presently induced a physical languor which fought with his mental unrest. The intervals of meditation between each stroke of the pencil grew longer. His eyes left the paper, lost all connection with the movement of his hands, and took on the involuntary stare of contemplation.

A disc of polished silver—the first vague form of the paten—stood on the shelf before him. Jimmy, under the stress of his unwilling thoughts, found

himself gazing into this grey and luminous thing, as a crystal-gazer into his ball. All his personality became concentrated upon the disc; the world beyond its edge was blurred, uncertain, ceased to count. He discovered that his mind insisted on projecting images upon it; as an artist, once a pencil is in his hand, will involuntarily make pictures on any scrap of paper within reach.

Mr. Redway's soul—or, as he would have preferred to say, his over-stimulated imagination—was scarcely, it seemed, within the control of his reason at this moment; for the image which it projected was such as belonged to a primitive and anthropomorphic faith.

It appeared to him, despite the dusty sunlight, that he stood in a circle of shadow. Within that shadow, a priest approached and offered him a chalice. But the figure of the priest was unattractive; his movements were clumsy and absurd. He wore vestments of vulgar pattern, gaudy colour, common stuff. Jimmy saw himself refusing the chalice, and saying, 'Who could hope to find the Wine of Life in such a cup?'

Then this unimpressive priest withdrew a great way from him, deep into the heart of the silver disc; and when he had gone beyond the shadow into the light, it was seen that his vestments shone with a great fire, and that the Cup of Eternity was in his hand. But now the brightness was too great: and the children of the shadow could not approach Him.

CHAPTER X

TRANSLUCENT ENAMEL

'Io ho tenuti i piedi in quella parte della vita, di là dalla quale non si può ire più per intendimento di ritornare.'—DANTE.

EVENING had come. Through the open door and window of the enamelling shed one saw pale sky, and against it the black lace-work of trees. London was near, and her influence plain. There were chimney-stacks on the horizon; interesting, serrated shapes in the dusk. Now and then the harsh bells of the electric tram brought sudden hints of new suburban splendours, of wide roads and small flats, of plate glass windows, glittering public-houses, and shapeless ladies in cricketing caps.

The gentle languors of the twilight ceased at the door of the shed. It was bright with incandescent gas, and filled with the soft roar of the muffle furnace. Three men and a woman, hot and intent —hair streaked upon the forehead, neck-bands opened for coolness' sake, sleeves turned back— were lifting bits of metal from the nitric acid baths, and spreading with a tedious exactitude the coarse

and coloured sands which were to melt and blaze into translucent enamel.

Paul Vickery took a slip of copper from Hugh's hand, and rearranged with careful touches the dull, powdered glass and water which covered it.

'My dear old chap!' he said 'You have paws like a Syrian bear! You've shoved all the opal ground in amongst the wings.'

'I'll have another shot with the next panel.'

'No, you won't! Let Miss Alstone,' said Paul sharply. He took the tongs, lifted the fire-clay door from before the furnace, and popped the bit of metal in with a detached and determined air.

Hugh accepted his dismissal meekly. He knew that his presence in the workshop was tolerated rather than desired. Between friends, advantages of income cannot condone errors of taste. Though Mr. Feltham, longing to be artistic, read Ruskin in bed every night between his prayers and his last pipe, he remained at heart the humble and trusty Newfoundland, ready at word of command to fetch, carry, or lie still.

Catherine came forward; took another piece of copper from the acid bath; washed it, and began very slowly and deliberately to place the lumpy, unmanagable enamels upon it, according to Jimmy's design, pinned on the wall at her side. Mr. Redway watched her with the outraged air of a mother who sees her baby being kissed by a woman whom she particularly dislikes.

Paul, having fired his own panel, took it from the furnace and put it aside to anneal. He worked with the air of dreamy precision which is so irritating to the inefficient. The purifying presence of manual work was between him and the other persons in the shed. He saw them vaguely, as we see the cloudy figures in a Rembrandt night piece; forms that part obscure, part exhibit, the light behind. There were other people about him; and a landscape of solid and enduring splendour, which interpenetrated and obliterated the flimsy ugliness of galvanized iron and match-board walls that seemed so absurdly actual to the outward eye. Paul's eyes—the cleansed eyes of the initiate—went past this outward, ugly appearance to the reality which it overlays.

That Better Country began at his feet. He stood within it; and beside him grave and radiant personalities, who watched their pupil at his work, encouraged him in his struggle with the obstinate artifices of sense. He worked in glass and water, that he might build in another dimension with colour and light. In that other dimension he saw the angels, as they passed to and fro incessantly, treading the infinite fields which lay in and about the bricks, backyards, and hygienic squalor of the Feltham estate. From the deep stillness of their world, always at harmony with its centre and always at rest, he looked back on the poor, restless, sensual plane: shaken, like an imperfect cinemato-

graph, by its incessant and jarring vibrations of sight, sound, and desire.

His friends were undisturbed by this shivering mist. They walked beneath great trees that shone, self-radiant, like torches of green fire; effacing the shadowy personalities of Redway, Catherine, and Hugh, as the splendour of sunlight effaces the dull atmosphere through which it is seen. He knew that they lived by the Word of Power which he sought. He was determined to wrest it from them. They smiled at their imprisoned craftsman; and he smiled back at them, with a sudden sense of comfort and well-being.

Catherine saw the smile, and felt ill-tempered and lonely: the miserable sensation of an outsider who watches the communion of friends. She was finding ecclesiastical art less satisfying than she had hoped. She gave to it all her powers of hand and mind; and received in return many orders, some approval, but little indication that her personality was appreciated, even perceived. Everyone, with the exception of Paul Vickery, felt her individuality—which hated its own solitude, yet refused to be absorbed—crossing the steady tide of concerted work. But he lived some life which she could not reach, tasted an experience of which she was ignorant. She saw him, but could not touch him: a more dangerous relation than the propinquity which prudent parents dread. Miss Alstone felt like the visitor at a modern menagerie, looking through plate glass—impassable

without some shattering blow—at a furry, fascinating animal, clearly exhibited, but as clearly beyond reach of familiarity and buns. She was set upon entering Paul's cage. She told herself that she would find truth there. Her Shadowy Companion, rousing itself from life-long sleep, perceived that she would find her master.

Presently Paul took the tongs, picked up his panel, and looked at it critically. The cooling process had already begun, and one could see something of the result. It was not encouraging. The opal enamel had condensed into ragged milky patches, and the browny pink of the fluxed copper showed between them.

Catherine leaned over his shoulder. 'Another failure!' she said wearily.

'And a bit more practice,' answered Paul.

'Worst of enamelling,' said Hugh. 'Such a beastly lot of practice, and precious little result! You fag away for hours; and then, after all your trouble, that rotten old furnace does you in the eye. An impossible sort of trade from a commercial point of view. No certainty in it. We grind away, and never seem any forrarder for all the time we waste.'

Paul laughed.

'What a dividend-earning old owl you are!' he said. 'What does time matter? We've all our lives, and there is no way of spending them that is comparable to this.'

'Shouldn't care to spend all my life in this stuffy little den!' replied Hugh. 'No joke these hot nights. It would soon be a case of *vita brevis* as well as *ars longa*. I should think the Johnny who invented that pretty proverb must have been an enamellist. Building is all right: carving and so on. Something to show for that; and it's a nice idea, gentlemen building a church, instead of leaving it to the lower classes——'

'This all is building too.'

'Rats!' said Hugh. 'These fiddling little jobs aren't architecture, or even art. They are just as well done in Birmingham or Munich; probably better. They have all the latest tips there, which I'm sure you haven't. The feed of that blow-pipe is absolutely out of date. I had a catalogue the other day full of ripping illustrations, quite Catholic and nice; they reproduce all the old designs. It's a big industry: sanitary workshops, modern plant, and a regular output. Jolly good thing for you, old man, that this little shanty doesn't require a license. No factory inspector would stand it for a minute.'

He took the tongs from Paul's hand; picked up the cooling enamel, which lay still upon its iron tray; and tossed it, with a sudden clumsy swing, towards the rubbish box.

'Well, there goes two hours and a half on to the scrap heap!' he said.

But the tongs were too large; Hugh's aim

uncertain. The square of copper—still at a dull red heat—slipped, was jerked violently from its tray, and flew at a tangent across the room towards Catherine, who sat at the bench. It seemed that it must strike her in the face. Paul put out a quick hand to intercept it; but before he could do so, Catherine, pushed by some indeterminate, over-mastering impulse, sprang up, snatched his wrist, drew it roughly and fiercely aside. Her action had an odd air of possession and authority. The burning metal brushed her finger-tips ; it left a red scar behind.

The simultaneous attentions of three young men do not always make a woman feel at ease. Hugh's voluble distress and Redway's strictly medical sympathy irritated Miss Alstone, whose universe at this moment could only comfortably contain two persons. The names of these persons were Adam and Eve, and the Tree of Knowledge was between them. She understood neither her own action, nor its result : for the warmth and texture of Paul's wrist, which she had held for an instant so tightly—with so great a sense of her own protective power and his need of it—was more sharply present to her in this moment than the pain of her burns.

There are some lessons which only the flesh can teach. Catherine had known Paul as a master, desired him as a comrade. Now, abruptly, she perceived him as a man : a thing with which she must war, to which she could minister. She was annoyed

and exalted. His arm, as she touched it, had drawn her across the boundary of a new and difficult land. Its warmth had lit the beacon fires of sense, which must guide her on this adventure.

As for Paul, he received for an instant a vision of that spiritual presence with fluffy hair which Scarlatti's music had once called out to meet him. The fret of work and comradeship had soon effaced that image. Now, the eyes which had seen it reopened; he heard again the call of that wandering, desirous creature seeking its kind. It was answered. The dark, starved spirit waiting within him—an Esau kept from its birthright by a Jacob of æsthetic and idealistic tastes—took command of eyes, brain, hands. The beacon fires blazed up for him; lit unsuspected corners of his nature with an attractive glow. Their smoke hung like a veil between him and the Far Country; but gave a homely and durable air to the earth, on which, as he now perceived, he really stood. His world had contracted. The angels withdrew beyond its boundary; all knowledge of their nearness slipped from him. He was alone in a bare and ugly shed, looking at Catherine.

As a bride peeps out from between sheltering curtains, provocative and afraid; so, from the deeps of her being, the elusive spirit whom he sought parted the thick curtains of convention and returned his look. Then, with sudden horror, each recognised what it was that they saw; what evil alchemy

had been worked by the fire of their touch. There had been an instant of magic, of ecstasy almost; now, two angry spirits stood away from each other with a sense of fear. Both were astonished. Both received the monitions of the body with the haughty disgust which fastidious young people keep for the homely hints of their evidently inferior relations. Arrogant chastity, amazed, wrathful, very sure of itself, forced them apart; and in that act drew them together. They had a dislike in common; an intangible fetter, very hard to break. Each loved the other's manifest hatred of love.

Catherine looked at her hand; first with astonishment, presently with indignation. It still seemed to be curiously differentiated from the rest of her body,

Hugh observed her preoccupation. 'Fingers hurt, Cathie?' he said. 'Stick them in your mouth: bang in—don't mind us—and suck hard. Nothing like it for a burn; keeps the air out.'

'We won't risk another accident to-night,' said Paul. 'I am extremely sorry that Miss Alstone should have caught it; but plenty of grease and an old glove will soon cure her hand. Luckily, it is only her left one, or it might have interfered with her work.'

They extinguished the fires, left the enamels to anneal in the cooling-oven, and went out. It was Paul who remarked on the extreme darkness of the night. Catherine agreed, observing that the electric lamps which lit the main thoroughfare

cast little or no light upon the precincts of the church. Neither noticed the curious silence of Mr. Redway.

Catherine was puzzled, preoccupied. She did not understand herself, and was not aware that she shared this good fortune with the rest of the civilized world. Paul, whom her presence still entangled, was confused, therefore cross. His idea of things forbade him to attribute importance—even evil importance—to material touch. Yet Catherine's fingers, like a scumbling brush passed along a clean outline, had left a blurred edge behind them. The sharp and definite world in which the true visionary walks was obscured for him. It had become complex, unsafe. He suspected for the first time the possibility of making mistakes.

Outside the gates he parted from his companions, and turned, as always at this moment, to say goodnight to his child. At first he could not see her, for the glare of the furnace still obsessed his eyes, but presently, as they accommodated themselves to the darkness, she peeped at him from the dusk; first the long ridge of the gable, then the projecting buttresses and the massy pinnacles which loaded them, holding them to earth and endurance whilst they pointed to heaven. He saw also the deeper darks of windows between: felt the broad shadow of the wall-base which bound all together, sitting firmly on the ground. No mere mushroom growth that starts naked from the earth; but a mighty

undertaking, well and firmly established. There she was, faithful and true, doing already the work for which he had created her : vault and buttress striving together, one long wrestling-match of love and labour, never to be quiescent till death should rend it asunder, and his stones fell back, as his body must do, to the earth from which all came.

The little stuffy shed, the little feverish fancies which it had nourished, slipped from him. He was out in the sane and mighty world, held very safely, he was sure, by his friends and masters ; saw only his church, sincere and solemn, brooding in the darkness that was, as he knew, no darkness to those for whom he built. The ardours of craftsmanship surged back on him, every muscle of his body tightening in obedience to the mood of the soul.

His heart cried out with passion, 'Building—building—building! Stone upon stone, alive and eternal! That's power. That's ecstasy. That's *life!*'

PART II

THE INVISIBLE SHRINE

CHAPTER I

SAINT HUBERT'S WAY

'Hither, hither, if you will,
Drink instruction, or instil,
Run the woods like vernal sap,
Crying, hail to luminousness!
But have care.
In yourself may lurk the trap:
* * * *
Enter these enchanted woods,
You who dare.'

GEORGE MEREDITH.

WAKING up is not always agreeable. It is pleasant to open one's eyes on tea and toast; but few women anticipate with eagerness the diurnal and inevitable struggle with hairpins, stockings and strings.

This objectionable aspect of returning consciousness was brought sharply home to Catherine Alstone during the ensuing weeks. She felt as if some stern housemaid of the soul had called her several hours too early, and forgotten to bring the warm water. There had been an imperative knock upon the inner door, which she was only anxious to forget. She did not wish to leave her comfortable and self-

consistent dreamland: could not face the chilly worries of a spiritual toilette. She sank back upon her pillows, and drew the blanket of egoistic industry close about her chin.

She was encouraged in this attitude. Paul now felt for her the vague dislike which we all entertain towards the objects that keep mortifying memories alive. With the uncharitableness of perfect innocence, he blamed her womanhood for the existence of his own manhood. He avoided her: a proceeding which never seems cowardly when the war is one of sex. It is true that the act of avoidance proved that there was something to avoid, but he described this something to himself as the awkwardness arising from a quite meaningless incident; the result, probably, of a hot evening following on a hard day. A mystic with a scientific past can always attribute to his nerve-centres the disturbances that are discreditable to his soul.

He readjusted himself. A little breach had been made in that safe, encompassing wall of his, and stones must fill it. He flung himself eagerly into the business of direction and example, was all day on the staging of the apse amongst the painters, or out upon the leaded roofs, where the saints that guarded each buttress were being brought one by one to their place. Face to face with these serene images, his hands upon their noble contours, their passionless eyes looking into his,

as his masters' often looked, he felt little disposition towards a serious treatment of the tedious farce of human life. Sometimes he descended amongst the sculptors with criticisms, suggestions, commands. But Miss Alstone, painting her glass and superintending the work of cutter and leader-up in the south-east chapel, was isolated from the great workshop of the nave. He seldom saw her; but did not connect this circumstance with his renewed sense of comfort and stability.

But the policy of *laissez faire* is not popular in highest heaven. The angels must be ever at their game, playing push-ball with their human toys, It presently happened that Catherine set up the first of the clerestory windows on the huge glass-painter's easel: Saint Hubert, the pioneer of the quest. The scattered bits of glass which made it were brought together, that they might be seen at their concerted work before the last firing put error beyond the reach of remedy; for a stained window is a coloured corporation, in which one discordant member damns the whole.

It was a sunny morning. The light poured through the little window of the chapel, and through the incoherent splendours of brown, green, and white glass set up against it. Paul, coming to judge the work, received a delicious impression: first, of sharp and sparkling coolness, of fresh-plucked leaves laid against the eyelids, and broken water under windy trees; next, of a door abruptly

opened on important things, a new layer of this confusing, fascinating universe disclosed and lit up through the medium of sense.

It was, as Catherine said, a 'foresty window.' It caught, in the austere outline of clustered pine-trees against white sky, the grave and mysterious quality of the inviolate woods. Strange beasts, one was sure, lurked behind these branches; strange gods lay hidden in the brake. One saw only the back of the astonished saint—so obviously an intruder in this world of greenness and wild life—who knelt, amazed and awakened, before the mystical creature that bore upon its antlers the Passion of his God.

It was Mark Gwent who had forced this treatment upon Miss Alstone. 'Never mind faces,' he said; 'it's the vision, not the saint, that counts.'

Mark now looked down, from his ladder at the chapel entrance, upon the litter of cartoons, and the leading-up bench, where Hugh Feltham irritated and assisted an elderly workman intent on the soldering of intricate joints. He saw also the great window on its screen: the oddly-shaped bits of coloured glass, without their supporting leads, looking like a piece ot crazy patchwork, tacked together and awaiting the embroidress. He wondered whether this simile had occurred to Mrs. Herford, who arrived at this moment and now stood beneath him, almost hidden by a large velveteen tam-o'-shanter, with bits of gold thread and floss silk clinging to the brim.

'I've just come in for a teeny-weeny look,' she said. 'I brought Jimmy a little Plasmon. He's rather white just now, and something in the middle of the morning is so good for anæmic people, I think. And I knew that Miss Alstone was finishing her window to-day, and I just longed to see it; so I thought I must have a morsel of a peep.'

She looked at Catherine, who stood on a raised staging before the easel; working, with hard brush and intelligent forefinger, on the dark-brown paint which covered the head of the stag. Her whole attention was concentrated upon the bits of glass before her, hand following brain as a terrier follows the scent. Paul came and stood behind her, but she did not turn or cease from working.

'The last painting?' he said.

Catherine took out a hard white light on the nose before she replied. The thing began to show the rough strength of her charcoal drawings: the same cynical contempt for prettiness. Seen near at hand, it was crude and barbarous in its coarse contrast of black shadow and harsh light.

'I've almost done,' she answered.

Hugh looked critically at the glass, and observed, with the assurance bred of income and incompetence: 'You'll have to soften the edges a bit.'

'I think not.'

Paul retreated to the far end of the chapel, half closed his eyes till light and dark were in unison,

and saw antlers eyes and nostrils start sharp and brilliant from their ground.

'That will be all right when it's up,' he said. 'You want it hard for an upper light; it must hit at a distance.'

'That *is* so true, I think,' exclaimed Mrs. Herford eagerly. 'I often think when you get quite close to things — even holy things — they look crude and ugly and peculiar. You see the stitches; and one can't do without stitches, even in theology, which is so unfortunate. It *has* to be fastened together here and there. But when you're a little way off it looks all right; just as this window will, I'm sure. We ought to let the angels alone when they're working; not be always poking our noses into the embroidery frame, amongst the tracings and tacking threads and pins.'

'Ah yes!' said Mark; 'when they have finished with us it will be time enough to exhibit the result. The half-done soul is seldom satisfactory, even to its Creator; and never to the idle lookers-on.'

'I'm sure you are right,' answered Letty. 'I dare say even the darling saints weren't as nice close to in their bodies as they seem to us now that they are dead.'

'Ah! I wonder!' said Mark. 'But that is scarcely a material thought, is it, now that the stress of creation is over and the miracle lives on? The wise lover does not meditate on the embryo of the beloved. It's better to think of all that we owe to the

lives of the saints: the secrets that they hold for us, and the ecstasies they unveil. Not of their habits, which were of their own time; but of their habitation, which is eternity. The romantic principle of Christianity is there; safe hidden, I hope, from the sharp eyes of rational religion. Think of those sublime adventures! Of Saint Catherine, and the parable of mystical union; and Ursula, that led the army of virginity; and Christopher, who carried his helpless Maker through the floods. An unmannerly fellow at meals, I have no doubt. Think specially of this Hubert, the wild sportsman, coming suddenly on the Divine Secret, revealing itself to him through Nature as he hunted alone in the woods: the victim of his pleasure made one with the Victim of the world. Ah yes! the romance of religion is hid in the lives of the saints, even as their lives are hid in God.'

'But it's queer, isn't it, how they came to think of this one?' said Catherine abruptly. 'An awfully picturesque subject; but not one atom religious, I think. Hunting and holiness! You couldn't have a more inappropriate combination.'

'Ah no,' said Mark. 'Very clever of you to have noticed it. Deerstalking; sport! A hopelessly earthy occupation, is it not? Yet, oddly enough, the great saint is generally like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord: and every life that is lived is a chase after something; a golf championship, perhaps, or, more rarely, the Absolute. It matters

very little which it is. "That a quest there is, and an end, is the single secret spoken." Where there's a hint of the chase and the Victim, there's always a path to the Heart of the Rose.'

Catherine was quick to justify herself.

'Oh, of course I know the *quest-motif:* the Graal, and the Questing-beast, and all that,' she answered. 'But to make a saint hunt game in the woods; where is the mysticism in that? It's just hard exercise and animal instinct. You might as well make an allegory out of pheasant-shooting.'

'Ah well,' said Mark, 'There is a secret path there, too, perhaps, which leads to the unnamable rites. There is more than one road, even now; though it needs a fierce desire and an unconquerable will to find it. Saint Hubert found it, and it led him to the Everlasting Passion; that daily crucifixion in which the natural world is justified. I took it once, and it led me to another such mystery. Strange matters are still done in the thicket, you know; it was not for nothing that the old Romans built altars there, and made it the home of panic terror and delight.'

'I *am* glad Saint Hubert goes in the west,' said Mrs. Herford softly. 'He hunted and hunted, and just got inside the Church. That *is* so true and beautiful, I think.'

Mark had picked up his mallet, and a shower of sharp blows, like a row of asterisks, broke the thread of conversation. From out of them his voice came presently in a deep, monotonous recitative, punc-

tuated by tapping mallet and falling chips. He seemed to hit his phrases from the stone.

He said: 'Long ago, when I was set on Saint Hubert's way, a message came to me; and I went down to the river, and took a boat that I knew of, and went up-stream towards the hills. I went past the wharves of the ships, and past the water meadows, very far up the river.

'And after a long while I came to the place that I looked for: to a silent valley in the hills, filled to the brim with quiet water, that mirrored all day the woods and the infinite sky. Small contorted trees stood round the margin of this water; they seemed the powerless and unhappy victims of some intolerable banishment. Far away at the end, the hills approached one another as if for an inner gate; and I went through that gate, and so to a second valley of water, deep-hidden, more silent, more secret than the first. Its margins, too, were hid by trees: dark and solemn trees, that stood bowed like wise women seeking a lost treasure in the glassy depths. Their hooded heads seemed instinct with some antique and sylvan wisdom; I fancied deep eyes bent on me as I passed. I had come far from the breezy river and the ships, deep into the immemorial country of the woods.

'Now, as I came down the inner valley, and between its hooded watchers, a cloud of birds rose out of the shadowy woods that were before me with hoarse cries; and they wheeled together in the sky,

and fell down upon the trees like rain, as if in some elaborate and ritual dance. It was then that I noticed the strange brilliance of the sky behind them; for it was the hour of that evening radiance which gives to a dim world the illusion of infinite light. I was encompassed, it seemed, by the still and waiting woods, by the inimical sorceries of the thicket, by the black and vivid shapes of wheeling, crying birds.

'Suddenly all the birds fell down on the trees together, and it was very quiet. The Messenger said in my ear, "It is the hour of the rites." I saw the sky like a live flame behind the trees.

'So we left the boat and came on land; and a secret path was shown me, known only to the people of that place, which went between austere and slender trees that bent to watch us, and by others that threw out tendrils to stop our way, and others more subtle that opened to us a wrong road between their trunks. But by the power of the Messenger we won past them all; and came out at last upon a bare place, where the trees stood back as if from a circle of enchantment, and I saw the brown earth, starred with mint and spearwort and sweet madder.

'Then I looked up, and saw all the forest pressing steadily and anxiously towards this place. But invisible hands kept them back from the ground that I stood on, as if that spot were too sacred for actual life. I too stood back; and, with the forest, waited.

'Now the sky took on a peculiar glory; and scents, as of precious herbs, rose from the dusky ground. And I saw that an altar was set up, and before it the fireless smoke of incense ascended. And One, Who must not be named, came and stood by that altar. But no confession was audibly spoken, nor Introit sung; for I worshipped with those who by their act of living confess the Eternal Life, standing always in His Presence.'

'Yes, but you know that's all rot! Trees don't last for ever, even on virgin soil,' said Hugh gruffly. This story seemed to him peculiar, and possibly unorthodox.

Mark went on, 'And I turned, and saw them all assembled to the sacrifice. Not only the great presences of the forest—the terrible guardians of fertility and keepers of the passions of the earth—but the wild-eyed fauns who watch us from the thicket, and all the humble, furry, timid creatures, smallest and simplest of the children of God. All the population of the woods had come to receive the benediction of this rite. Far away in the trees, a bird sang; a wordless Gloria full of wild fervours, a passionate invocation of the Light of the World.

'Spices were thrown on the censer, and small cleansing flames sprang up within the smoke. It was by fire that the elements were blessed. When they had passed through these flames, something of the earth-sorcery stood purged and white beyond

the threshold: the antique wisdom of the forest made an oblation to God. It was known then that a certain hope had been administered and a promise of healing given. Voices rose up: faint cries of the little creeping things, and the strong and urgent voice of the great powers, that came, more terrible, from the darkness of the brake. I heard the agony of the natural world, as it climbed the steep stairway towards God. The air was full of wings and of the cry of distant waters. It was thus that the Sanctus was sung by the people of the forest. "Vere dignum et justum est!" '

Mrs. Herford cried out softly, 'Why, how perfectly lovely! It's the Mass!'

Mark looked at her with a sudden friendliness, and nodded. A draught came from the clerestory and ruffled his hair, which was iron-grey and rather long. He shook the locks into place again with a gesture more deliberate, but not less poetic, than that of the wind, chipped away a little more stone, and went on speaking.

'But when the hymn was ended and the woods were silent, tearing and rending sounds came from the thicket, and one sprang out and stood alone in the green circle. I perceived him to be driven by the pricking of an irresistible desire. I saw the cleft feet and shaggy limbs, and the greatness of his stature; but his face I could not see. He knelt and kissed the earth, and fear fell on all the little waiting creatures.

'And he said in a loud voice, "Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini!" And instantly he who stood by the altar cried, "Te igitur, clementissime Pater." And the rite went on, whilst that terrible penitent knelt on the threshold, and all the people of the forest stood silently in their place.

'Thus a secret sacrifice was consummated, and an incredible oblation made. The Immortal Victim was offered, not only for the great presences of the woods, but for the small and helpless also; those little ones slain every hour of the day, the faint cry of whose torment ascends incessantly to heaven. The hooded sorceresses drew near, their deep eyes fixed on the altar. Except for the hushed voice of the Celebrant, the woods were silent. The earth was dim; the fire in the sky grew faint; the smoke of incense lay across the place in blue folds like a veil——'

'That's awfully good,' said Hugh. 'Just gives you the feeling of that beastly evening mist which catches you in the larynx, and lets you know it the next day. I see the whole thing now.'

Catherine and Paul were watching Mark's face with an attention which almost involved forgetfulness of self. They had been caught out of their environment by the images which he evoked; and walked, amazed, in the heart of those ancient woods which still stand thick about the House of Life. To Catherine a new world was opened, and a new hope. She knew herself to be at home in

this natural yet magical kingdom of hunger, struggle, and inarticulate desire; and, mistaking it for that superior country in which Mark and Paul habitually moved, was convinced that for her, no less than for Mr. Gwent, the Messenger had come.

Paul's eyes had the narrowed and intense look of a watcher, who gazes from the rampart of his safe castle into the secret and terrible under-world of the forest; where the shuddering of leaves may be the harbinger of an unspeakable horror, or a scurrying rabbit the forerunner of panic death. He looked at Saint Hubert's window: the white glass cut by tall, straight trees that parted for the passage of the mystical victim, the kneeling hunter, urged on by his lust to the final discovery of this. Through and beyond the window he felt—saw, almost—the primeval thicket; that impassioned earth which the ancients knew, whose intense and terrible life still surges up in springtime through our mangel-fields and allotments, still cries to heaven from beneath the sewers and gas pipes of many an Acacia Avenue and Bellevue Road. In this place Saint Hubert had accomplished his quest, wrested the secret of the universe from the heart of that natural order in which it is hid. Mark went on with his tale, and as he spoke fresh detail was added to the picture which Paul saw.

'Strange elements were offered: even those that had passed through the flame. New names were

given to them, and holy powers. These were the instruments of that mystical Passion by which the natural order, no less than the restricted church of man, seeks reconciliation with the Light. An inconceivable presence came to the sanctuary of the woods; an awful substitution was commemorated, a secret consolation drew near. The penitent upon the threshold lay prostrate, and the Messenger who had brought me to this place said, "Look not, for it is forbidden." But I thought there were sounds of weeping, and presently I knew that a great peace came and brooded over the forest; for it was known that though death would continue, and fear also, yet all was well, because Earth had offered the holy atonement with desire and burning love. To these, how familiar a rite was the slaying of a humble victim: how divine a hope lay hid in the raising of this daily sacrifice to the plane of an intercessory gift! By the elevation of this Victim was symbolized the raising up of the natural order: and by the drinking of this unnamable Cup, the tasting of that strange wine of eternity which shall be held to the lips of all those who come to the narrow door of the first death.

'It was therefore with a thankful recognition that the Agnus was sung at the consummation of the rite. But through its intervals I heard the strong voice of the penitent; and it was full of the anguish of unslaked desire. "Calicem salutaris accipiam et nomen Domini invocabo!" he cried.

But I saw not that the Cup was vouchsafed to him ; for though the sacrifice of the woods be offered for the healing of creation, none may come to the communion of that altar save He who intercedes.

' Therefore, at the ending of the Agnus the light was taken from the sanctuary, and from the penitent the final hope. The fire had died from the sky. The altar was cold. The trees drew closer, held as I was in the gathering dark : and still I thought that deep eyes gazed from under the green hoods, gazed on the terrible penitent who still prayed for the Cup of Initiation, and on the cold altar whence none replied.

' Then the Messenger said in my ear, " Ite, missa est !" and I turned and went back by the secret path to the courts of quiet water ; and so by the serviceable river to the wharves of the ships, and to the great world.'

* * * * *

Catherine went home to lunch possessed by a nervous excitement which she mistook for revelation. The crisp cosiness of her bedroom, chintz and satin walnut mitigated by framed studies of the nude ; the very hot water waiting in a brass can ; that peculiar blending of the merits of British home and Swiss hotel which is produced by commercial prosperity and a head-housemaid ; these things jarred, but did not dislodge her dream.

She had heard the deep cry of the forest, and a passion latent in her blood rose to answer the call.

In the torment, rapture, and eternal fertility of the natural order, she discerned a reality on which her wild need of adventure and self-expression could sate itself. Saint Hubert's way, she thought, was hers. As a child who finds a key is sure that it fits the jam cupboard, so it was clear to Catherine that her newly-discovered clue must lead to the Door of Hope. This was the solution of her uneasy dreams ; her hunger, longing, fear. Through and by the life of the senses, she would arrive at the end of the quest. She forgot that the Cup of Initiation had been withheld from the creature of the woods.

The accuracy of the luncheon table, its combination of double damask, solid silver, and aggressively artistic glass, annoyed her. Tingling with a sudden sense of the coloured and tumultuous life—the grotesque and inconceivable process of creation—which is hidden under the tidy coverings of the world, she felt it difficult to justify a feminine household which had inherited no characteristic of the fruitful and desirous Mother of Men : unless perhaps her apron, now carried out in lawn with hem-stitched frills.

Mrs. Alstone, always amiable, and therefore necessarily dense, seemed a strange parent for a gifted girl of pagan yet spiritual perceptions. She was apt to be tiresomely natural at lunch ; for she lived, like a middle-class family, in the dining-room of her soul all morning, and put on artistic tastes with her tea-gown at a quarter-past four.

She now picked out a well-browned cutlet—avoiding the mashed potato on principle—helped herself to toast, and spoke with enthusiasm on the subject of blouses.

'Flat tucks are coming in,' she said. 'I saw some early autumn models at Marshall's this morning. So much more becoming to me than the gauged fronts. But they won't suit you, Catherine: you haven't sufficient figure. You should try to eat more, and fill out those dreadful hollows in your neck, or you'll be positively scraggy at thirty. Plenty of milk, and a little massage at bedtime with some nice skin-food, works wonders. One has to take these precautions when one leads a busy, intellectual life.'

Catherine listened with that air of silent endurance which parents call insolence, and children call toleration. She had little taste for her mother's method of treating the body; using the drawing-room when she had company, and the bath-room once a week. She was determined to live all over her little villa of flesh, every inch of it; to break down barriers if need be, force secret panels long locked from light and air.

There were, she knew, hidden cupboards. Something they must contain: treasure for future spending, perhaps, or the shameful surprises which are part of the great heritage of man. She had no fear. She would open all doors, going to and fro at will from boudoir to basement, and even to the place

of purification. Such a scheme, she felt, proved her to be superior to her family. Her vulgarity, in fact, was more elegant than theirs; better cut, with finely flowing contours, though still of the same material. She had transferred, without transforming, their dense and decorous egotism; and merely strove to extract from her excited senses the temporal comforts which they had obtained from the sale of embrocation.

It was not Saint Hubert's way; but it constitutes at once the danger and delight of this adventure, that hasty and self-absorbed explorers are apt to miss the road.

CHAPTER II

THE QUEEN OF THE DOOR

'To love a woman is, for an artist, to change his religion.'—ARTHUR SYMONS.

THERE was a morning when Paul came hastily into the vestry and said :

'I want to see the model for the top of the central door.'

Mr. Gwent approached the modelling bench, removed wet rags with a firm and careful hand, and disclosed a figure of great purity and simplicity, newly modelled in moist clay. It seemed the very spirit of womanhood ; which, climbing the Tree of Life, had dropped one by one its grosser characters, and now shone in the light of intensest innocence, as a thin shell is transfigured by an inward flame.

Vickery looked on it without pleasure.

'It isn't right : it won't do!' he said. 'This the Queen of Beauty ; this the final type ? Why, it's just a vague, pretty, virginal woman ; not a mystical queen. Don't you see, all the meaning, the intention, must be gathered up in this ? If the Door of Beauty is the great entrance to the eternal things—

and surely that is just what we are trying to say, trying to open—the queen that stands over it must be real and magical: the mistress of all Powers and Dominations, the bride that flames up to meet the Love Divine. Not Virgo Amabilis merely, but Rosa Mystica and Sedes Sapientiæ; generous as sunlight, and chaste as burning fire.'

'You seem inclined for eloquence,' said Mark. 'Be careful. Eloquence in the artist is apt to be volubility in the art. I fancy the Veiled Queen a silent woman.'

'Oh, I don't want a shouting statue; a crumply, naturalistic thing. Only a hint of life, wonder, reality. Don't you remember, the old Hebrews put Tiphareth—Divine Beauty—in the very centre of the Tree of Life; the straight way to the supernal light. Get that. Chuck the convention; the solemn eyes, and smooth forehead, and silly, pious look. A Mother Superior is no image of the Mother of God.'

He looked suddenly at Miss Alstone, who watched and listened with an air of intelligent deference. It had seemed to Paul lately that she always understood what he meant, stood skilful and ready to interpret on this plane the designs which he supposed himself to receive from beyond; a grateful circumstance, in view of Mr. Gwent's new and irritating attitude of hostility. Paul began to fear that this attitude, this prejudiced reception of his own ideas, indicated a defect in Mark's mystical outlook. He felt it his duty, for the

building's sake, to impose his own vision of life on this dogmatic dreamer. That vision increased day by day in colour, significance and enchantment. He already looked back with surprise and amusement on the ignorantly austere tastes of his past.

Catherine now said, 'I think this figure is too obvious, too definite. One sees everything. A hooded face in deep shadow would be much more suggestive of beauty; being invisible, everyone would imagine it according to his own ideal. It's a tremendous tip in composition to leave out the thing you really want to say. Sculpture should always be stimulating, never final. People will be far more impressed by what they have to put in for themselves than by anything you can put in for them.'

Paul glanced at her, quickly and intently. A strip of canvas—one of those cloths in which modellers wrap their clay—lay on the floor. He picked it up, threw it abruptly round Catherine's head; pulled the folds, hood-like, over the face. The light, falling from a high window, cast a deep shade upon her brow. In this shadow, and under this unappropriate cowl, her ardent eyes, all the eagerness and loveliness of that small, fine head of hers, were vaguely distinguishable; an infinitely exciting suggestion of elusive loveliness.

'See!' he exclaimed. 'That's it—that's right—the wonderful reality, half-hidden, peeping out from the veil.'

'A very taking baggage,' answered Mr. Gwent, 'Circe come to sanctuary, perhaps. But I think you mentioned the Sedes Sapientiæ ?'

'And isn't it that ? Isn't it life ? I'm sick of these pale dead symbols of yours. It seems to me that you first find your figure, your person that is to be the incarnation of the Idea ; and then you whittle it away, try to get rid of it altogether. If that is how you feel, why try to express the thing in terms of humanity at all ?'

'Just because, in the long run, the material accretion called man's body is the best symbol that we have of man's soul. Curiously exact, in certain aspects of it : one can almost see the flame behind the shade. But one must select, suppress : value given to the lamp only tends to obscure the light behind.'

'But the thing must live on this plane before it can on the other.'

'Say rather, must die on this plane !'

'But you must live to die, as well as die to live. The mystical death demands a living victim ; not a nun.'

'Ah,' said Mark. 'You think so ? A very significant opinion. Yet I had thought vocation, not volition, the most probable guide to the door.'

'Anyhow,' exclaimed Paul abruptly, 'that damned chilly thing of yours won't do.'

He looked round the vestry, now filled by Mr. Gwent's plans, performances, and personality.

There were lumps of wet clay in their rags, a litter of sketches, modelling tools, white dust, and grey images. There was also the strange, straight figure which Mark destined for the Door of Wisdom: its face turned eastwards, invisible; something, one knew not what, held closely to the breast; the naked and defenceless flanks torn by wild beasts. Mr. Vickery's eyes came back from it to Catherine, and to the clay model of Divine Beauty: orderly, passionless, yet strangely radiant. There was certainly a discrepancy between them.

'We're all wrong; all false,' he said. 'Something—I don't know what it wants.'

'Wants a baby, to my mind,' observed Hugh suddenly. 'Very Roman without. I may be all wrong about art, but I jolly well know what's Anglican and what isn't. I'm sure there will be a row when the bishop sees it.'

He opened the outer door. A riot of sound and sunshine came through it, with a hearty air of careless life which was made more piquant by the austerity within. It was Saturday afternoon, and the street was full of peg-tops, dirty pinafores, and joyous screams.

'Lots of little kids out there,' said Hugh. 'We'll get one, and see how it looks.'

Paul followed him saying, 'Perhaps that is it, after all. The growth, the result, the thing born: one needs a symbol of that.'

Mr. Gwent looked after them, and through the

sunny oblong of the door, observing, 'If it is an assurance of fruition that you want, *circumspice*.'

But they did not hear him, nor see the hand of April—that pagan Primavera who is also Saint Mary of the Flower—dignifying a mean street with her gift of sunlight and natural hope.

Her colours of white and blue were eager in the sky. Little clouds went soft-foot on their business at the bidding of a lazy, happy breeze. There was everywhere a pushing up of beauty through ugliness: of sudden smiles on anæmic faces, primroses budding in sooty window-boxes, green buttons newborn on black trees. Cottage doors were flung open with a gesture of welcome; and cats sat upon the thresholds, washing their faces in the sun.

Mark looked at these things, and then at Miss Brewster, who sat upon a plank stretched between two ladders, high above the confused evidences of his violent and disorderly industry. He shook his head at her solemnly, and she smiled with an air of understanding. They shared a certain disdainful enjoyment of the folly of things, and also a knowledge of the Latin tongue; a possession which gives the cheap claret of commonplace piety some of the virtues of a vintage port.

'Vickery's progress in ignorance,' said Mark, 'is an interesting phenomenon. I observe that he knows a little less each day.'

'He knows what he wants, I think.'

Jimmy, who had come to the vestry with a freshly

sharpened chisel for Miss Brewster's use, interrupted :

' No,' he said ; ' he doesn't know. He wants the common life ; but he will be deeply shocked when he discovers it.'

He looked significantly towards Catherine. The canvas hood was still drawn over her face. It isolated her, as a religious habit might have done, from her companions. She could not talk to them : scarcely heard their theories and comments. It seemed to her at this moment that she was concentrated upon herself ; waiting, aloof, for some inevitable, inconceivable solution of her ardours and uncertainties. She had always been aware that such a solution existed ; had anticipated it with the fearless curiosity of an Artemis who has received a high-school education.

Yet, by a curious inversion, that egoistic sense of security which is the birthright of all intelligent women was now withdrawn. She stood there, alone and helpless ; waiting upon an order which she felt to be imminent, but as yet unexpressed. She did not belong to herself ; but to some adventure which waited her, she knew, at the next turn of that woodland road on which she had set her feet. She would meet something : hardly, perhaps, the Victim which stands at the end of Saint Hubert's way, but certainly a strange and interesting experience.

About her, the work went on. Emma shifted her position a foot or so along the plank, that she might

attack another part of the sculptured frieze and cornice which ran above the oak presses and white walls. Jimmy, on the steps of the ladder, placed tools within her reach. This attitude of servility had lately become grateful to him. 'All service ranks the same with God,' and also, very often, with the godless. Where nothing is worth doing, it matters very little what one does. By the adoption of this opinion, Mr. Redway obtained a point of departure for that general process of depreciation by which life was cheapened until his failure in it seemed a virtue rather than a defect. He refused to contemplate the whole intention of his labours; narrowing his outlook as starving men draw the belt tighter about their emptiness. But it was only Emma whom he served.

Someone came to the open door, and that secret and unreasonable watcher within Catherine's heart started to instant attention.

Hugh entered.

'Here's your kid, Cathie,' he said. 'And a ripping little youngster, too. Paul picked it out. A bit groggy on the legs, but Gwent needn't copy that. Models are cheap in this district; a new halfpenny and two ounces of suck.'

Catherine raised her head. The hood fell back, and with it the obscurity in which she had lived. Paul stood in the doorway, against the sunny background of the spring. The child was in his arms: no cherub, but a white-faced, limp-legged two-year-

old, the ordinary urban product of ignorance, early marriage, and Swiss milk. Miss Alstone, in whom good taste was apt to deteriorate into fastidiousness, was not attracted by its tartan flannelette frock, plush hat, soiled pinafore, and dubious hair. But Paul held it, Christopher-like, against his shoulder; carefully, as if it were a King's son.

He approached her, and his approach drove the mists at sword point from Catherine's soul. Their rout left a wound behind. She knew herself abruptly as a jealous woman, who suffered torments at the sight of a child in the arms of the man whom she loved. Fear and pain kept her silent. Only she stretched out her arms involuntarily, as if to snatch the baby away; destroy the image of a fatherhood in which she had no share. There was no one else, at this moment, in her world; only Paul, from whom at all costs she must take this symbol of a life and hope that had been bought by another woman's pain.

Mark, watching them, caught sight of a woman—a wood-woman, a Lilith, he thought—peeping out from the neat corseted body that had seemed a cold negation of the liberty and beauty of the flesh. He saw also a man who came towards her and put a child in her arms, with an imperious gesture in which the very principle of sex seemed to be summed up. The life of the place was suspended, clay and cartoons became a shadowy nothingness, whilst he waited on the consummation of this sacramental act.

He saw Catherine receive the child, and instantly, as if fuel had been thrown on an inner flame, her personality transfigured, enhanced. A woman bearing a burden must be either a queen or a drudge. A queen if she bear it proudly, as a peasant can; a drudge if she permit herself to bend under the weight. It is the same whether the load be a child in the arms or love in the heart. Catherine held her burden proudly, and looked a queen. She was concentrated on the crown that she had won, and forgot the liberty that she had lost.

Jimmy touched Miss Brewster's skirt, and muttered: 'Look at Miss Alstone posing with the child. She seems a size larger than usual.'

Emma glanced at her. 'There are Louis XVI. heels in the spiritual, as well as in the fashionable world,' she said.

As for Paul, he was caught into the magic circle by which Catherine, whilst she awaited him, had felt herself to be separated from the world. He and she were alone in it. The child that he had brought her was warm against her breast; and with it some other thing also, some virtue that had gone out of him to increase the burden and dignity of her days. He knew that an immensely important act had taken place, quickly and in silence.

There she stood, in the litter of sculpture and carpentry; the clumsy folds of white canvas thrust back from her soft black hair, the squalor of common infancy held in her arms. There had been a tran-

substantiation, by which these vulgar elements of reproduction became the instruments of a mystical birth; operated in him also. He was changed. All the phases of their past intercourse rushed away from him: his condescension, indifference, fear, dislike: his final dependence on her help. The personality that had known these cold and safe sensations fled too; and he had the strange and, as he supposed, unique, experience of feeling an alien and feverish being rise up within him, seize and use the senses which he was accustomed to keep for superior employments.

With his eyes it saw, not the angels, but the warm sorceries of the world. With his ears it heard the peculiar and appealing voice of sex. With every nerve in his body it reached out, frenzied and clamorous, towards some unknown irresistible event. Already his body was shaking under the abrupt command of this dictator; was transmuted and unified into the scarcely-leashed organ of its will.

As the consumer of domestic electricity scarcely acknowledges its kinship with the thunderstorm, so Paul did not recognise this odd and sudden savagery as one with the polite love-making which one sees on the surface of life: that sentimental shuffling of the human pack which depopulates one home to fertilize another. It seemed rather to be in the nature of a mystical experience; an emblem, long sought amongst the stones, now discovered in the flesh.

His angels—though, oddly enough, he could

not see them — were clearly, by this device, showing him the true Queen of the Door. He fancied that deep in her eyes one might find the Word of Power; for it was evident that he here touched the fringe of some enormous secret, which all other men, for lack of this one woman, had missed. It seemed curious that he, too, should have missed it during their year's intercourse: this experience, this lifting of the veil, which would, no doubt, prove to be the consummation of the quest. He perceived an outer ritual of sense running parallel with the inward mystery.

Some rubric of this ritual now impelled him to approach Catherine; to lift the hood from her shoulders, arrange its folds about her face, with the decided but infinitely gentle touch that he kept usually for his stones. Only thus could he control the violent impulse to seize her firmly, brutally, which surged up when her hair brushed against his fingers, when his hand adjusted her arm, that held the child. Already he knew dimly that her pain and his passion made together the lock and key of this door.

When he had finished his work, it seemed to him that a very wonderful symbol had been created: at once of the universe, of art, of religion, of all that he intended his life and work to be. He looked at Mr. Gwent, expecting that he at least would see the meaning of this marvellous thing.

Mark glanced at the model, and said sardonically:

'A very pretty domesticity. The spirit of evolution, I suppose ?'

'A spirit of life, at any rate,' said Paul violently. 'And that is what matters. Keep the work human ; keep it real ! I know now what you meant when you said that the body was the best symbol that we possessed of the soul.'

He took the child from Catherine's arms, quickly and roughly, and went out into the street.

When he had gone, Mr. Gwent was heard to say softly : 'It is written in the Book of the Quest that Lancelot was the father of Galahad ; but it would appear that under the present dispensation the converse is occasionally true.'

CHAPTER III

STAINED GLASS

'How shall I see Light in a light so dim?
Windows away from God are walls from Him!
Of walls, then, am I made.'

LAURENCE HOUSMAN.

AT the hour of sunset, Paul returned to the church. He was accustomed, when work was over, to come here as to a trysting-place; that he might take up the spiritual citizenship by which he was made free of the Beloved Country, shake off for a little while the teasing fetters of appearance, and speak with his friends. At this hour time and space, those sheet anchors of the intellect, were slipped; and he pushed out into the happy land of Everywhere, and into the eternal moment which is the Now of God.

He knew well the outlines of that landscape on which his eyes would open. There was a range of hills; far off, but very clear. Their strange enticing summits shone, lit from within, like violet flames. From these had filtered into the world of sense that mountain magic for whose sake man's soul will lead

his body from the gluttonous splendours of Swiss hotel to the verminous austerity of Alpine hut. A mighty river came from the hills: a moving riband of light. Deep forests grew on its banks, and paths went between the trees; paths down which he had wandered, in his happiest hours, to experiences of which one may not speak.

These things he would see first; and presently the flowery plain which crossed the grey follies of the Feltham estate—the plain on which his foundations had been planted—and its inhabitants, that august and ever-present population whose web interpenetrates and knits up the warp of earthly life. His friends would show themselves openly, going to and fro under his arches, and gather him into an ecstatic silence that seems the last term of perfected speech. It was at this time that he applied the test of a transcendental reality to the perishable images of his art, and saw the stones of his sanctuary made radiant by that Light to which they did honour; whose veiled image they should one day shelter from the world.

On this day Paul anticipated his hour of vision with peculiar pleasure: the pleasure of a student whose precocious researches have made him, as he thinks, his master's peer. By the event of the afternoon, new mysteries had been unveiled to him. The absurd and often squalid illusion of life had suddenly revealed its meaning; more, received a consecration. A new fire had been lit, and a new

altar created. Often in the past the world had seemed a cobweb that fettered the limbs, and dimmed his view of the reality behind. Now he perceived it as a Giorgione landscape, all deep woods, wonder, and warm flesh : at once the medium of mystical initiation and of strangely entrancing sensual experiences.

In this mood he came back to the Four Crowned Saints : very sure of sympathy, expecting, too, that the enhanced vision which had showed him the angel in a woman might show him in the angels some further thing. He entered. The place seemed unusually big and dark ; seemed also something of a stranger to him, like a son who has achieved abrupt independence, and seeks to emphasize the fact by a definite withdrawal of confidence.

For the first time he was assailed by the miserable parental sense of smallness and loneliness in the presence of this great child of his. In the dark it had, he thought, the horrible look of completeness which all artists dread : for no funeral is more bitter than the requiem which bids farewell to finished work and leaves it in the corrupting hands of time.

Twilight had already come : masking the austere evidences of labour, hiding the altarless sanctuary, and the scaffolding which filled the apse with plaited timbers and the builder's heart with a glad sense of something yet to do. He could see against the dusky background his brave and patient columns, conceived in love and raised in under-

standing ; could feel, almost as a personal stress that braced his muscles to meet it, the eternal thrust of the vault that they carried so tirelessly, the steadfastness of the buttresses that shared the never-ending strain. It was a living, striving, elastic thing : fit symbol of laborious and unresting love. Like the world whose little image it was, it created the illusion of stability and rest by and because of the incessant struggle of part with part ; balanced, harmonized, brought to unison by the vigilant spirit of its creator.

Yet the place seemed on this evening alien and mysterious : possessed a disconcerting quality which had not been present in his plans. ' Landscape is but a state of the soul.' Paul at this moment looked out upon a world that he had never seen before. Presently it occurred to him that this world was curiously lonely ; empty. Its dusky walls were strangely solid. The darkness grew, pressed upon him, as an unformulated grief presses upon the heart.

High up in the clerestory windows he saw the flaming message of the saints ; their triumphant light and colour accentuated the blackness through which it broke. There was no hint of his companions. The veil did not lift, as on other nights. He was puzzled, uneasy, slightly annoyed. He had called on his friends and received the insulting, incredible rebuff of ' Not at home.'

He put out his hand into the emptiness that was so thickly peopled. They would scarcely, he

thought, ignore this intimation that he wanted them. But it passed without resistance through spaces in which he knew that the country he loved stood firm, radiant, and real; fell to his side with a jerk that sent its vibrations through his frame.

With this demonstration of loss he became afraid. The vast, vacant, horribly solid place suddenly took on the aspect of a prison. He walked forward. His feet knocked against a chisel, and sent it flying before him to hit the base of a column with a clank curiously suggestive of chains. The abrupt sound and the knowledge that his loneliness was illusion, deepened his fear. He was incapable of further exploration. Some terrible thing had happened: some severance of his universe. Those dreamy walls of his, built in love that they might live on another plane, were now a gateless, impregnable barrier which shut him from his home.

The grey illusion of earth, only bearable—as shadow is bearable—because it is a witness of the light, had suddenly become real, actual; the only validity. He saw with horror the resurrection of that dead universe whose ingenuities he had once explored with joy: that system of whirling balls, teeming with obscene, unmeaning, self-devouring life, tossed into infinity by some careless force to play out the tragi-comedy of Cosmic evolution. Had he loved his stones and laboured with them solely that he might encrust a few square feet of such a world with the evidence of his madness and his desires?

He gathered himself in more closely, as if to avoid the neighbourhood of these inimical walls. The darkness, it seemed, grew very quickly, crept to his feet, hemmed him in. It was hard to believe that outside the church the sky was still golden, and gave light for the discernment of a profusion of homely, comforting, and actual things.

But the windows brightened as the night fell. Now they blazed out of the blackness; eyed him, he thought, with a peculiar significance. Presently he forgot all other things: was possessed, as an enchanter within the magic ring, by those twelve splashes of insistent illumination set in empty, unfathomable space.

* * * * *

It is a justification of the glass-painter's art that his work stands, in its result, as a perfect symbol of all that is meant by a sacrament. As nature, from one point of view, is but an image or appearance of beauty which depends for its loveliness on that which is not seen; so in essence a stained window is a beautiful image through which light streams from beyond. The most perfect glass, as the most perfect sacrament, is that in which the elaboration of beauty is never allowed to encroach on the light-giving power.

In the clerestory of the Four Crowned Saints, Miss Alstone's windows, after fifteen months of concerted industry, now stood complete: twelve great saintly figures, austere in outline, rich in colour,

sharply relieved against the clean white glass. On the north, Saint Lucy, by whose intercession Dante received the light; Catherine, the bride of the Word, Barbara of the Tower, Teresa, and the rest. On the south, the knights of the Christian quest: Hubert, Martin, Christopher, and the mystic hidden chivalry of Dominic, Francis, Augustine.

These were the personalities with whom Paul was shut in the darkness. He watched anxiously, almost uneasily, their growing intensity; the gradual establishment of a relation which placed him, as it seemed, within their power. He was persuaded that they watched him, for they were alive: and behind them he suspected, perceived, other lives, other intelligences, tier upon tier, ring upon ring.

> '. . . All that chivalry of his:
> The soldier-saints who, row on row,
> Burn upward each to his point of bliss—
> Since, the end of life being manifest,
> He had burned his way thro' the world to this.'

By a process well known to contemplatives—the process whose truth is seen dimly behind that ever-living veneration of image and shrine through which so many pass *ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem*—he saw, as he saw the light through the actual glass of the windows, the eternal spirit shine through the pictured saint. He remembered Mr. Gwent's observation: '*The romance of religion is hid in the lives of the Saints, even as their lives are hid in God.*' He felt exalted by their presence, lifted

from earth; troubled, but no longer alone. He understood something of their language, for these were aflame, as he was, with some great desire: something that possessed them, pushed them on, as his new-found marvel did, towards a secret consummation. The restlessness, the agony, the adoration: all these he shared with them. He stood in the midst of a ring of great lovers, who called on him to justify his state: was brought to the bar, arraigned before an actual and eternal Court of Love.

Presently they spoke to him; and he perceived with astonishment that they did not address him as a brother, but rather as a traitor, a denier of love, who has sold his birthright and can no longer understand. He was mortified by this lack of comprehension. Catherine for the body, and beyond, through her perhaps, some unimaginable bridal of the soul; so sublime a programme, he thought, should make him free of any company. Yet this company gave him no welcome: no invitation to resume his inhabitance of that Celestial Country in which their feet were firmly set. There, they looked towards some deep centre of being, as the petals of the Rose of Paradise turn to its heart: gazed on an ineffable glory, and within that glory saw the Word of Power. But he, the servant of that Word, who had longed for it and laboured for it—who had touched, as he thought, the letters of its root that very afternoon—was an outcast with bound eyes.

It was unjust. He was impelled to defend himself, and cried out indignantly :

'I have found Love !'

But they answered him very gravely : 'We lost Love that we might find.'

He said : 'Nevertheless, I have seen the secret.'

They replied : 'No ; for the secret can be neither touched nor seen. It is the negation of all visible things, and all earthly satisfaction of desire.'

And Lucy said : 'I was blind that I might see.'

And Hubert : 'It shone for me in the forest ; yet escaped me in the chase.'

And Christopher : 'I bore it with pain and labour through the floods, but naught received.'

Then Augustine answered : 'What matter, since we have known it and loved it best ?'

And Dominic cried in triumph : 'For this I carried the white lily as a sword.'

And Francis : 'For this was I sealed with the secret heraldry of Love.'

And Martin : 'I sought amongst the poor and naked.'

And Teresa : 'I found in the lonely cell.'

And they cried together : 'For this we gave all, endured all. Yet not for our own gain did we give, but wholly for Love.'

Now it seemed to Paul that the light behind the windows came from a white fire, cold yet ardent, which set an impassable barrier of flame between him and the place where he would be. In its radiance

he saw—clearly for a moment, then with a growing sense of battle, of the rending of gathering clouds—how a bodily chastity must be the agent of a spiritual consummation : a single eye the condition of perfect sight. All was withdrawn and folded from him: the beauty that he had built, and the something greater than beauty for which it had been raised.

Life, like other works of art, demands for its right exhibition space, detachment. One cannot judge the composition from within the frame. Paul in this moment stepped back from the picture to which he belonged, and now saw it for the first time in all its majesty of proportion, as one may see a great fresco spread out on the wall of the world.

He saw himself associated with the creative labours of the universe; at work upon a scaffolding which shot up, beyond the shadow world of sense, into the everlasting light. He saw himself falling from that scaffold to the clay in which it was planted. He struggled passionately to retain his foothold, clutched each chance projection as he fell. Yet all the while he knew that the fall had its ecstasy as well as its humiliation ; knew that soft arms were open to receive him, and that he went gladly to their embrace. He was a fool ; and some strong, tiresome animal within him rejoiced at his folly.

But the other inhabitant, the clear-sighted Dweller in the Innermost, wept for the loss of its kingdom and its friends. The voices of con-

queror and conquered strove together, a horrible medley of triumph and despair. He was like a little Belgium, the unwilling entertainer of belligerents whom he could not control.

He remembered the enamelling shed, the first warning that he had received of the rivals within him, and his attribution of that warning to a disorder of the nerves. He applied to himself now some of the vigorous language with which he was accustomed to admonish his workers.

'*The ecstasy of love*,' says Nordau, '*is due to the explosion of a nerve-cell*.'

Paul now perceived that he had encouraged with strychnine a disease that demanded the knife. This detestable, adorable Catherine should have been cut from him, flung aside. Her influence had spread, till, like a cataract, it cut him off from the light.

When he had reached this conclusion he suddenly realized that he felt sick, that his feet were very cold, that nothing seemed worth doing any more. He had lost the angels for ever : he was sure of it. They stood, like these saints, high above him ; radiant, unchangeable. But his place was in the darkness below. Nevertheless, he knew that he must look at Catherine's window before he slept that night.

* * * * *

Miss Alstone stood before her long mirror, and admired the effect of a new nun's-veiling night-dress, with a picturesque collar of ribbon and lace.

It fell in straight folds from the shoulder, and its hem covered her feet; giving her, she thought, the air of a priestess, notwithstanding the irreligious fluffiness of her fringe.

She considered the events of the day. She loved Paul: that was evident. She would marry him. Love, to her, meant capture; and marriage the only form of capture open to respectable girls. She longed, too, to immolate herself, to offer up her being in his service, and marriage seemed to her just such a sacrifice; a state of servitude, inevitably inimical to one's art, in which one was concerned occasionally with ecstasy, but constantly with cooking-butter. She wanted to do something unselfish. It might still her queer, new craving to suffer, to give; and a life devoted to the ordering of Paul's pet puddings seemed to her to combine the pains of martyrdom with a foretaste of its celestial reward.

But the marriage of artists would be different perhaps. She and Mr. Vickery were evidently made for one another. She wondered why he had been so slow to perceive it. She would be the inspiration of Paul's life, and he the encouragement of hers. He could teach her much about spiritual matters, which would be very interesting, of course; but she could teach him more about the laws of design. It was all very suitable.

She got into bed, put a pleasantly-scented pocket-handkerchief under the right-hand corner of the

pillow, and relapsed into the dreamy state which is induced by a hot-water bottle and vague but agreeable meditations. Some unsolved problem seemed to have taken possession of her mind; some question on which her immediate comfort depended. But she could not see, identify it. Her thoughts ran round and round, squirrel-like; searching for the Sphinx which worried her with hints of a riddle that she must solve. At last, as the clock struck eleven, she turned on her pursuer, secured it, and then discovered with annoyance that she had been wondering whether Paul Vickery would ever care to kiss a girl. She put out her hand, and switched off the electric light.

Paul, standing on the pavement, watching her window, held by it, saw the radiant square extinguished, and realized that night had really come.

He turned away. When a window ceases to give light it becomes a black hole, a thing of horror: like an eyeless socket set in a human face.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEFENCE OF THE ALTAR

'J'ai toujours compris l'artiste ainsi ; une sorte de prêtre, un prêtre de l'idéal, qui doit aussi faire vœu de pauvreté, de chasteté.'—RODENBACH.

IT was Whit-monday. On the strip of waste ground which ran from the Feltham Reading-rooms and Ruskin Institute to the precincts of the Four Crowned Saints, swing-boats, naphtha lights, hoarse cries and conflicting melodies commemorated the descent of the Dove.

The church reared itself into the intense silence of the upper sky : a grave, dark shape, whose foundations stood in the confusion of the common life, and held its pinnacles secure in starry fields. A smoky glare, in which alluring, glittering things ceaselessly whirled and swung, the discord of whistles and steam organs, crackling of shooting-galleries, voices of men and beasts, hung round its flanks. One imagined a little City of Dis become, by some confusion of celestial topography, the suburb of a solid and sober New Jerusalem.

Catherine Alstone stood on the outskirts of the

fair. She wore a rain-coat and a tam o' shanter; and, like the heroine of romance who put a spot on her veil, felt herself to be protected by an impenetrable disguise. Rain had fallen, and the thick, much-trampled mud in which she walked was redeemed by shining pools which reflected, with an added magic, the moving lights of merry-go-rounds and the long blue flames before the booths. Earth and air alike were jewelled; wore the barbaric ornaments of some evil, enchanting queen.

A curious illusion of irresponsible sorcery was created by this fevered, elemental world—so wonderful in its movement, so squalid could one have caught it at rest—suddenly thrust in amongst the dull and steady streets which surrounded factory, church, and schools. Veiled by the darkness and smoke, it was strange, beautiful, attractive. Its many noises seemed blended into one great, exciting invitation to throw off the tedious convention of civilized life. Bells clanged, rifles cracked, the horses upon the huge steam round-abouts rose—fell—rushed round; the delirium of motion. The very air shook with a passionate vitality.

Even the people—the rows of noisy girls who went arm in arm to the encounter of lads with vacant faces and a shiny curl of hair upon the brow, the sharp-eyed workmen and tired, flat-breasted young wives in draggled skirts and cotton gloves—who crowded the lanes between shows and stalls, besieged the flying machine, gazed callously

at the picture of the Living Skeleton, ' The Greatest Horror on Earth ' : even these were dignified by this atmosphere, acquired a certain significance.

Miss Alstone's trained eye took in with great pleasure the pictorial qualities of the thing, and the impossibility of adequately translating the effect of arc lights into paint. There was a booth in front of her : ' The Eldorado Palace of Delights, patronized by the Royal Families of Europe.' Its façade was painted cheerfully with ballet girls embracing cavaliers, and the motto, ' Honi soit qui mal y pense.' A stout, narrow-eyed woman, thin-lipped and strong armed, wearing a soiled satin blouse and pale blue motor-cap, sat at the entrance scolding the apathetic crowd which refused her insistent invitation to ' walk in.' On the little platform before the door, a big fat girl, in pink velvet knickerbockers and very long yellow shoes, performed a slow, monotonous dance. She made step after step with the cold precision of a mechanical doll : little, shuffling steps that hardly had a visible intention, yet contrived to make a curious sensuous appeal. She had a serious, abstracted air. Her eyes were vacant.

The people watched her ; without interest, yet without power of escape, like needles unwillingly detained by a magnet. Catherine also watched. She was loosed, on this evening, from that diurnal duty of boredom which presses so heavily on the young, intelligent, and well-fed. The impropriety

of her position, the moral courage and immoral deceits which this solitary adventure had required, all delighted her. The frenzied life of sight, sound, and motion in which she was plunged had a strange and strong attraction for the awakened animal within.

She heard a sudden burst of laughter, there was a little movement of the crowd, as if some new focus of interest had been created, and a woman's voice at her back said, 'Lor', there's 'air! Is 'e a poet?'

Catherine turned and perceived with great amazement Mark Gwent, who stood, unconscious of his company, in ecstatic contemplation of the dancer in the long yellow boots. His long hair, long cloak, short stature, and peculiar hat were matters of great interest to his neighbours, one of whom now said:

'Poet? 'Im? Not much! 'E's a gent having 'is fun.'

Catherine touched his arm. He turned his eyes from the stage unwillingly.

'Ah, you have found it?' he said. 'Wonderful, is it not? A reading from Rabelais, edited by Ally Sloper, and staged by the Great God Pan.'

He shook his head solemnly, said, 'Marvellous. Very marvellous,' and continued his observation of the dancer with a concentration which his companion found insulting. She was sufficiently artistic to admire Mark's originality; sufficiently British to resent its social results. She suddenly realized that

the whole thing was vulgar, and she herself rather tired, and said pettishly :

'It seems to be exactly like an inferior music-hall, without the comfort of reserved seats.'

'It could not make a higher claim,' replied Mark. 'A music-hall dance and a morality play : the only two entertainments left us to which any significance is attached ! They have a certain relation to the great mysteries of life ; especially the music-hall, which is full, for those who understand, of elemental appeals and demoniac symbolism.'

Catherine looked at the girl with new interest, and said, 'She is so absurdly serious about it !'

'Naturally enough. Her business is highly mystical. She is a priestess ; she is in direct communication with the mysteries. That slow, serious dance can never shake off the primitive religion of which it was the vehicle once : it was the first way, you know, that men discovered of stepping beyond the edges of the world.'

Whilst he spoke, the girl began to cross and uncross the long toes of her yellow shoes in a series of small deliberate jumps. Her mouth was slightly open, her face expressionless.

'I can't believe that this means anything,' said Catherine. 'It's merely ridiculous.'

'Here, perhaps,' answered Mark, 'But it is hard to see any dancing without losing the obsession of earth. It is the last relic of a great ritual, you know, like everything else that really matters.

Oh, yes! that is really so; though no doubt you think it would be a rather dangerous doctrine if it were not so obviously false. But when human beings are actually in earnest, they all develop the liturgic sense. You see that in the rites and ceremonies with which we surround our games and meals and love affairs: the serious matters of the present generation. Oh, yes! the Lover's Breviary has yet to be written; but if he is worth his salt, he has his psalms and antiphons for the heat of the day, as well as for Matins and Lauds, and his *Nunc Dimittis* when evening falls.'

Catherine said appreciatively: 'That is a beautiful idea. Of course I quite see that love is a sort of religion. Even regular agnostics and ethical people feel that.'

'Love? What do *you* know of it? What do you mean by it?' exclaimed Mark. 'There is only one real love; the sacrificial passion of the soul, which cries *Introibo ad altare Dei*, knowing itself the victim, and its bridegroom the priest. But all's love to us nowadays. It is a word, a label, that we stick on to the picture of our desires, from the lowest to the highest; from a marriage of convenience to the Kiss of God.'

'Oh, but I mean real love; the magic, wonderful, irresistible thing,' said Catherine. 'Everyone knows that is holy and worth having, even if it is rather inconvenient sometimes.'

Mark did not answer for a moment. A row of

work-girls, linked arm-in-arm like twentieth century Bacchanals, broke roughly through the crowd in pursuit of a coy, tweed-coated young clerk. They forced the people one against the other, and there was an immediate ebullition of angry elbows and excited tongues. Catherine was thrown violently against Mr. Gwent, and, for the first time, felt grateful for his presence. He put a firm arm round her shoulders, and drew her into a damp and narrow passage which ran between the Eldorado Palace and the Diorama tent. They at once found themselves alone, completely hidden by the darkness. The pale circular shape of a sleeping terrier, a sack of potatoes, a battered sailor hat, and a can of paraffin were dimly visible. Mark pointed out some packing-cases of convenient height, and said,

'We will rest here for a short time.'

When she was seated, he added, 'I want to save Vickery if I can.'

Catherine suddenly felt sick and helpless. She feared Mark, and now perceived that she had always known him to be her tacit antagonist. Disclaimers were useless. He knew all. He had chosen his ground and his weapons, and she must defend her happiness as best she could.

She said, 'From what danger must he be saved?'

He answered, 'From the corrupting influences of a merely human love.'

'Corrupting?'

'Yes,' said Mark violently, 'Corrupting. When

a man like that falls in love, it always entails his degradation. Don't you know that? Have you not seen already the influence of your handiwork? The Sons of God came down to the daughters of men, but one does not hear that they ever rose again after the fall.'

'But they may have been more useful—more alive,' said Catherine weakly, 'Their existences more complete. People have been made greater by love—more divine, more like immortals—than by anything else in the world.'

'Yes?' replied Gwent. 'You are thinking of Dante, perhaps? But that was a passion without possession. Or possibly of Dr. Faustus? He invited Helen to make him immortal by a kiss. She did so. But is an immortality of damnation a desirable gift?'

Catherine began to speak, wildly and eagerly. The throbbing life around her, the bewildering and exciting sights and sounds—gongs, drums, whistles, coloured flames—the frenzied men and women on the leaping horses, the maddening beat of the great swings: all seemed, she thought, so many witnesses to the justice of her claim, to the imperious demands of the quick, tormented flesh.

'You can't cut off a man, a whole man, from life, like that,' she said. 'You can't! you shan't! It is not fair!' There are all sorts of wonder and magic and mystery in life, in love—yes! in human love—as well as in work. I've seen; I know! People

find the secret that way too. It opens your eyes, and you see a vision; like Saint Hubert in the woods.'

'You seem proud of your little passion,' observed Mark, 'But remember that it links you with the animals, not with the angels.'

'It can't. I feel better, nobler, more spiritual because I love him. I see a meaning in life now; to live for his sake, to serve him. Do animals do that?'

'And he is to be murdered that you may be saved?' said Gwent. 'Whose love is justified by that process? You kill an artist in order that a woman may learn to grow up. I begin to suspect the Psalmist of a certain irony when he sang, "Blessed in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."'

'Of course,' replied Catherine, misunderstanding him, 'my art *may* suffer. But I don't think that it will; we shall work together. I shall make him happy, and that is the first consideration. I mean to devote myself to him entirely——'

'—The recipient of devotion is not happy; only the giver——'

'And with a home of his own, home interests, his work will be better too.'

'No,' exclaimed Mark, 'Never that! The great things have never been done by domesticated men. Saint Benedict built monasteries, but Henry VIII. only destroyed them.'

Catherine said with passion: 'That's rot—nonsense—I won't believe it! I know what you are

preaching—unnatural, stunted lives like nuns. It's wrong; I'm sure it is, for Paul as well as for me. Everything is living hard all round us; fulfilling itself. It is natural love and beauty and life that saves—the fulness of life, the whole of it—not lopping off bits all round. It's in nature, with all the living, growing things, fertile and wasteful and full of desire, that one sees the vision; just as you did in the story of the Woodland Mass.'

'*At the ending of the Agnus, the light was taken from the sanctuary, and from the penitent the final hope,*' said Mark. 'Do you remember? How admirable you will find your handiwork when that hour strikes in Vickery's soul.'

'But why need it ever strike? Why should he lose the light? It's unjust, cruel, absurd!'

'Because the *candida stola* is not to be fastened with a true lover's knot: because there is a spiritual chemistry, as the old alchemists knew, and one of its laws is that the white flame and the red can never burn together.'

'Oh, but I shall never interfere with him like that. I know what artists are. His work must always come first; with him, with me too. I'm not sentimental about it: I shall get the sense of kindness and comradeship, and a way of fulfilling my life, but it would be ridiculous to expect an eternal ecstasy and adoration.'

'Still more ridiculous to desire it,' answered Mark. 'When you had got it, it would only make you feel

humiliated and uncomfortable, as an impostor might have felt if the jar of precious ointment had been poured at his feet, instead of that of the Master. You cannot give back the burning love and thanksgiving which such an offering demands. A really noble love hurts far too much for the present generation—born under chloroform and lulled by spiritual sedatives ever since—to care much about it. I doubt if one woman in fifty could bear even a passion without an anæsthetic ; and passion compared with love is like toothache compared with appendicitis.'

'But they both come without our asking,' said Catherine. 'It's true, if you like, that I wanted Paul to love me ; but I was not such a fool as to wish to love him.'

'And you don't love him. If you did, you would desire his perfection, not his loss ; welcome the eternal pain of renouncement for the sake of his freedom, not sacrifice his liberty for the temporal satisfactions of sense.'

'Welcome pain—enjoy it ? How can I ? Why should I ?' she exclaimed. 'I've a right to be happy ; to live, and taste life, have adventure and experience and light. But pain is loneliness and emptiness, and the negation of everything that I love.'

'It is the divine adventure of the world, and the only way to experience,' said Mark. 'If you cared for Vickery as much as you think you do, and he kissed you so hard that it hurt you, you would not

mind, I suppose, because you love him, and that sort of rapture always hurts. Well, if you have a lover's outlook on spiritual things, you will be glad to accept pain from them, too: yes, and loneliness, emptiness, and negation.'

'And what waste of one's opportunities and one's life!'

'Renunciation is never wasteful. It is the one thing worth doing: a step along the road from the many to the one—the only and inevitable journey of the soul. You are asking Vickery to turn his back on that quest. *That* is wasteful.'

'But love is a sacrament, and marriage, and all that. They are symbols of union. He would find through them just the same.'

'There are other sacraments, and greater. Don't you see, in every image and myth of the Quest that has been created, the journey has been always from the two to the one, from the ecstasy of union to the Virgin Birth? You wish him to reverse that process in the interest of your desires. He was placed at that point, in that plane, in which he could see reality; work in it and for it. Chaste, solitary, if you like, as far as this side is concerned; but recompensed on the other by incredible ardours and satisfactions. What will he do, do you think, when you have had your will of him? How will he endure the ceaseless companionship, the intolerable curiosity of love? All his life he has been alone. Even now, his dream encloses him more

strictly than any cloister could. What does he see? What world does he live in? For whom does he work? We do not know. "There are two living countries, the one visible, and the one invisible." His country is shut from our eyes. What do we really know of him now, any one of us? Nothing! But *you* will know; you will not rest till you have dragged him down to the level at which complete comprehension is possible to you.'

'But I don't want to degrade him to a mere humdrum domesticity. That would be squalid and disgusting. Don't you see, there is something more than that; something different and wonderful, even in the natural world?'

'Of course. There is the Apple of Eden,' said Mark, 'Which was not in the first instance roasted, and served with rice pudding, I think. But that was its fate later on.'

Catherine rose to her feet. She was exasperated, mortified, speechless. She suddenly thought of her womanly dignity, and realized that immediate departure in its wake constituted her only hope of retrieving the remains. But her path was blocked. A man had come to the entrance of the dark and narrow lane in which they sat. A woman was with him. She was flushed, her eyes shone, her lips had a foolish, deprecating smile. Catherine moved; the woman saw her, and shrank back against her companion. He peered into the darkness.

'What ho! Maudie,' he said. 'House full, eh?

We must get another doss. Blamed if it ain't the poet, got in on the early doors.'

The woman giggled nervously. They went out again into the light.

'Love!' said Mark. 'How beautiful, how spiritual, is it not, when seen in its elemental simplicity? "Everyone knows that is holy and worth having," as I think you observed earlier in the day.'

Catherine looked at him in sullen anger, and did not reply. He suddenly siezed her by the shoulders, pulled her down, held her, gazed into her face.

'You should be treated as that woman!' he said. 'You should be conquered, possessed, deprived of your sting! When I think of the danger that menaces him—of the thing that you are in your essence, your *real*,—I could take you, drag you down into this life, feed you with that. This is the love you are meant for, these are the ardours that you understand. Why light the fires of hell in him? They are burning, and at your service, in every other man you know.'

'Because it is only his fire that warms me, lights me, gives me what I want.' She wrenched herself free, and went on. 'Oh, you have spoilt it all; made it vile, ordinary, squalid! I hate you! I saw the woods once; all the rapture of the earth! And now you have made me think of the detestable and sordid part: of laundry-books and middle age, and losing one's figure, and dining-rooms furnished in fumed oak.'

'Ah, yes!' said Mark. 'It is well that you should think of them. Marriage is a sacrament, as you very truly remarked; but it is most often the Black Mass of ugliness that is celebrated on the altar of the hearth.'

Catherine rose, and looked out on the seething, teeming life which hemmed them in; and beyond, to the black ridge of the Four Crowned Saints, where it cut the starry sky. She saw in sudden contrast those two manifestations of the life-force—Paul's white-handed work, truly creative, the engendering of spiritual children, his duty, and his due: and this other, outward, gross fertility, this reading of life that would lose the Eucharist for love of the bread and wine. There was a shifting of values. Her own desire was no longer the focus of the picture; it had grown too great for that. For a moment she saw chaos in travail; actually realized the folly of personal happiness, the paramount importance of fate. Below, the common life; a Kermesse, in which men and women seized each other, joyously or madly, for a moment, were parted and vanished away. Above, the stars; and the death-angel, who waited till the delirium was done. The pairing of a girl with the man to whom she wishes to be mated was not the main purpose of those inflexible powers. As well arrest the cosmic order because a tomtit has fallen in love with a thrush.

She did not think the future attractive. But she was going to do something big, noble, self-sacrificing; and that is always a great consolation.

CHAPTER V

THE STONE OF SACRIFICE

'Love cannot exist without a powerful egoism which surrenders itself to it, and denies and sacrifices itself.'

MARTENSEN.

WHEN Catherine Alstone awoke to find a letter in Paul's handwriting standing between white teapot and brown biscuits on her morning tray, she experienced an emotion which would certainly have been pleasurable if she had not checked it in time. After a prolonged sojourn amongst the *Court Guides* and *Christian Heralds* of a dentist's dining-room, the sight of the forceps comes as a relief.

She had waited patiently for the supreme test of her courage; the sharp wrench in which hope and desire should be torn from her life. But it did not come: and at the end of a month the dread with which she had at first anticipated it gave place to disappointment. Paul seldom approached her. He seemed concentrated upon his work again: very silent, very harsh, with the air of a man who is cutting his way through dense undergrowth and has little breath or attention to waste on human

speech. That he should retrieve his mistake without her assistance was detestable to Catherine. As inexperienced travellers in Italy are annoyed to find that Florence is not one huge fresco nor Assisi a Little Flower in stone, so she was irritated and amazed by the discovery that the path of abnegation on which she adventured ran through the same homely scenery as those broader and more pleasant roads which she had left. Week succeeded week, and everything went on much as before. Everything, she supposed, would go on for ever and ever. Mark had invited her to suffer, but she was only bored.

Diana was a huntress as well as a virgin. The flight of the victim will spur any woman to the chase. It was therefore natural that Catherine should be tempted forward by Paul's retreat : that his silence, energy, and growing emaciation should seem to her so many steps towards the lair in which he would turn and face her at last. Sometimes she caught the look of enmity and longing which he threw at her, and smiled at him very sweetly. Paul, angry and adoring, would go back to his work ; increasing colour, softening outlines, heightening relief, in the mad attempt to beat out some sensual satisfaction from his unfriendly stones, awake in them that strange, unresting life which shook the air between himself and Catherine.

Miss Brewster said one day to Jimmy : 'I never look at them now without thinking of

Botticelli's "Mars and Venus." He sleeps—dreams —and she is waiting, quivering, till the moment when she will awake him to another and a different life.'

The moment had come. Catherine sat up in bed, and opened the envelope with a nervous, uneven tear which hardly released the paper within.

The letter began rudely and abruptly.

'Let me come to you. I am full of some horrible emotion. I can't eat: I can't sleep. You madden me. You have taken everything: surely you must give something?'

Catherine came of a commercial family. This struck her as a reasonable point of view. She did not wish to behave dishonestly towards Paul. She might refuse, for his sake, to do business: but his letter suggested rather a sentimental felony, the obtaining of love on false pretences.

She said to herself, 'Of course I must let him come: talk to him a little. It is only fair that I should explain my reasons for sending him away. He might think I did not care for him, and that would be horrid. And then I can point out that he has a great career before him, and how much better it is for him to devote himself to architecture instead of muddling himself up with married life.'

She felt almost sweet tempered as she thought of this interview, of her own beautiful nature, and Paul's appreciation of it. She had run her quarry

to earth ; now, sword at throat, she would generously give him his life. Renunciation seems easy before breakfast. She put on a clean muslin dress, and tied her front hair with a white bow above the left temple. She had heard that nuns wore white when they took the veil. She, too, was about to refuse the world in the interests, not of religion, but of art. That made it seem worth while ; for art, she knew, was an important matter. Often in her student days she had condemned the weakness of women who abandoned this glorious vocation and sank to the mean satisfactions of a pretty flat, an admiring husband, and an occasional appearance in Burlington House. She perceived that Mark Gwent's point of view was hers also ; but where he would save Mr. Vickery's career, she, very properly, would protect her own. Releasing Paul from the perils of matrimony, she also released herself.

Her future, too, held great artistic possibilities. She saw in a comforting vision a Chelsea studio, advanced and unsaleable pictures, interesting etchings, and evening 'At Homes' frequented by delightful creatures with dishevelled hair. Her undoubted talents, divorced from domesticity, and wedded to thorough anatomical knowledge, would take her far. It was not the first time that the crape and bugles of ambition had proved the solace as well as the sign of sentimental bereavement.

The chatter of sparrows outside her window, and

the answering twitter of self-approval within, drowned the deep cry of the woods.

* * * * *

Mrs. Alstone's boudoir condensed the discomforts of a London June. Walnut-wood chairs with Utrecht velvet cushions, two bowls of stale roses and a copy of *The Moment's Modes*, lowered blinds, a western aspect, and three fourpenny ferns in the grate: these things imposed that air of solemn and slightly dingy domesticity which is peculiar to the back dining-rooms of the British race. Catherine felt that it would be comparatively easy to refuse an offer of marriage in an environment so symbolical of all the disadvantages of that state.

At half-past three Mr. Vickery entered the room, and the striped blue walls and framed steel engravings at once retreated to a vast distance.

'Well,' he said, 'I'm beaten! Here I am. Take me.'

'No!'

He came near, flung an arm about her shoulders, and held her firmly. She was compelled to meet his eyes: and felt frightened, excited, rather flattered by his lack of courtesy.

He said: 'Then it is Mark?'

'Mark?'

'Yes,' he repeated. 'Mark. He watches you, and you fear him. Ah! I've seen it, day by day. There's something—I don't know what—some tie, a hatred or a love. I can't endure that. You are

for me; separated, intact. Don't you see; don't you know? If I refrain, that is one thing: but no one else must touch you. That would be hideous, intolerable, impure.'

'You are wrong. There is no one; no one at all. I wish to be free.'

'It's not true: you are on fire! If not his, then mine. You took the child. Mine from that minute!'

Catherine pulled herself together, stepped back, eluding his other arm stretched out to detain her, and spoke with neatness and dignity.

'No,' she said, 'you will spoil everything—your work and our lives—make it common, dreary, base. This has been my fault. I am sorry. But I must not let you do it: that would be worse.'

He laughed, for the thing was absurd. When one is sure of a woman, there is flattery in her little struggles to escape. But he caught her hand again and held it tightly as he said:

'I will do it; I must. Common, dreary? Why, all our lives we have been waiting for this, and you know it! It will be heaven.'

'Not even purgatory. Only an edge of earth that you are not meant for.'

'Is it because you dread the responsibilities—all the domestic part? You shan't have that at all unless you wish. I want to be your lover, your comrade; that is all.'

'No!' she exclaimed. 'Never that. If I could

marry you, I'd accept the horrors as well as the joys.'

'Friend—darling—why won't you have me?'

'Because you ought not to marry.'

'Ought? Perhaps not. I'm confused; blind. But it has been pushed on me: I did not ask for it. I couldn't help it. Too late to withdraw now——'

'Never too late!'

'Yes: for I shall never forget you, never be free. My vision is gone; all that I had. You have wrapped me round in clouds; wonderful clouds that shudder when you are near me. I can't see the light as I used to do; but instead there are marvellous colours, incredible things. Perhaps with your love you will give me the light again. It is you that have taken it away.'

He seized her arms; held them cruelly, viciously, like some medieval litigant bent on breaking the defendant's silence by the *peine forte et dure*. She felt herself in peril and cried out,

'Don't—don't! You hurt me.'

'I don't care! I must reach you; touch, wound, anything. That's love, not keeping pain away: else, we should kill our darlings. You must have death or pain: no third choice. If we part, that is death, coldness, decay. But we shall not part; we cannot. These silly words don't matter. Love and pain; that is what I've got to give you. Take it. You shall take it. It is born of you. You cannot refuse your child!'

'No, no! I do refuse! Leave it at this. Don't let us be disillusioned, dragged down. You know yourself that this is a lower thing. Love your work again: that is your true life, your true hope. I'm sure that artists should be celibates, like monks and things. You shall not fall by me.'

'I must. I shall. Dearest, sweetest! perhaps it is all right, perhaps it is divine. It cannot be evil if you are in it. Any other woman, perhaps: but you, you are mine, meant for me. You belong. There's such a wonder in this. I see everything now alive, exultant; new colour, new light. You have blessed the world for me and made it fruitful. All the cold, harsh symbols have gone——'

'——And presently,' she answered, 'the foolish sentimental ones will come.'

'Too late,' he said again, 'to think of that. You *owe* me reparation: you must pay. Am I to live alone in the dark? I have lost—oh, never mind that! I've tried everything—horrors, follies, every ritual, every secret—to get back. No use considering that side any more. All this dreadful month I have fought, struggled, worked in the dark. Don't think that I accepted the loss, the exile. But now it is over, and I'm glad—yes! glad that I was beaten. Now I'll defy—I'll live—it is my right. You shall not refuse. And what does it matter? With you, I see another light, a bright fire. It burns me up. Darling, it will wrap us round—

consume all the past, all the earth, all the dream, everything—once we are together!'

He flung himself upon her; but she caught his wrists and pushed him violently away. She dared not risk the kiss without which, as she supposed, no proposal was really complete. But as she thrust him back her fingers caught his shirt-cuffs; pushed them abruptly up the arm, uncovering the flesh. She gave a little cry of fear then. Her grasp relaxed; and he freed himself instantly, pulling down the sleeves again. But she had seen his arms. They were marred and wounded, with curious scars, fantastic mutilations, broad weals deep-cut into the flesh as if by the binding of tight thongs.

Horror, pity, shame, were loosed like a flood by that sight. He had said, 'I've tried everything—horrors, follies—to get back.' In this momentary revelation she perceived the existence of dark places, unnamable experiences, in that world beyond the world wherein he moved. Thence he came to her; tortured, body and soul, by the agonies and austerities with which he had sought to quench the fire that she had lit.

Not the battle, but the victory, is the test of chivalry in womanhood. It is in the hour of man's helplessness that her soul rises to its height. Paul's surrender woke Catherine's honour; all the knightly instincts of mercy and protectiveness. The tide of pity—an emotion never loosed from its boundaries before—surged up in her at the sight of that maimed

flesh : swept æsthetic horror, selfish shame away. By this evidence of unavailing struggle she was assured, without doubt, that the issue was in her hands. She could not take advantage of a prostrate foe.

Paul's eyes had followed hers to those poor, scarred arms that cried for quarter. There was a silence. Catherine wondered whether she would ever forget his face : hungry, imploring, resentful. Few have seen the civilized human spirit cast off its pretences and defences, show its misery and terror in the midst of the bewilderment of life. A selfless longing to help and succour the poor entangled angel in him arose in her. She suddenly saw herself mother as well as mistress : gentle and pitiful, anxious only to save this desperate driven child : and at once her part seemed easy and inevitable, for it is only renunciation between equals that is difficult. As between mother and son, compassionate woman and impassioned man, abnegation is the simple, natural thing.

She went to a small chair by the French window, looked out on the square of grey gravel, the dreadful *rouge et noir* of geraniums and sooty earth ; and thought of this radiant, ardent spirit whose vision had once transcended these ' equivocal shapes.' Now he was caught by the passions of a dreary world and fought, agonized, like some trapped animal ; choked and convulsed, partly by the net that holds him, partly by his own instinct towards liberty.

She forgot that she too had been fighting for light, for life: and as the sun of her happiness set the petals of her soul opened, as happens with certain very precious flowers.

'Oh, don't let me drag you down to the earth! I can't. I must not. I love you too much,' she said. 'I can give you up: you have taught me. Don't take back the lesson!'

He came nearer to her; but she retreated, pressed herself anew against the grey panes of the French window as if she hoped that they might melt to give her escape to the fresh air, away from this passion-laden room, which seemed to her now to vibrate with secret forces—desire and abnegation, the resolution of the soul and the weakness of the body, crossed and woven together like the web of Fate.

'You shall not——' she said. 'Oh, go quickly! It is the dark smoke behind the flame.'

Paul replied with anger:

'You are wasting time. The thing is decided. I know it—you know it. These struggles—yours and mine—make no difference. I'll go now, and there will be a bit more hell for both of us. But I shan't change; nor will life.'

He knelt by her. His lips were on her hand. She heard him say:

'My dear, my little one! Think! One little corner of the world, shut off, kept for us, inviolate! Isn't that worth while? Isn't the dream well lost for that?'

But her heart seized only the last words and held them, as a musician holds the keynote of his harmony: murmuring again and again in ever fresh combination, '*Well lost! well lost!*'

When at last he had left her Catherine breathed deeply several times, and with a touch of the curiosity which leads us to gaze into the faces of the condemned, went to the small Empire mirror which hung at a convenient level near Mrs. Alstone's favourite chair. She thought that her face looked thinner than usual, and remembered that in Paul, too, spiritual combat had implied emaciation.

She looked round the dreadful little room; at the sofa cushions, smutty windows, lace-edged blinds. A patch of tarnished sunlight on the carpet mocked her. It made her think of dexterous pictures by Renoir. Then she remembered that such artistic tricks must fill her future, and came very near to tears. The dull blue walls, which had melted in Paul's presence, closed in on her again. 'The Pursuit of Pleasure' by Sir Noel Paton, which she had banished from the drawing-room on leaving school, was prominent in its polished oak frame.

She saw Mrs. Alstone's writing-table; the Stores' List, open at carbolic soap, propped against a 'Churchman's Almanac,' with Memlinc's Madonna at the top of the page and postal information at the foot. There was a litter of tradesmen's books, private view cards, and square, expensive writing-

paper, on which the large black 'M' in its little wreath sat with an air of widowed coquetry.

Catherine noticed with surprise that the attitude of all these things was normal. Then she noticed also that they were her life, her home: the background on to which she would inevitably relapse in spite of brave projects, struggles towards independent work. He had gone out, away; to agony, no doubt, but also to freedom, to salvation perhaps. She was left here: here, where there was little to respond to the cry of new-born life in her heart.

The spiritual, no less than the natural birth, asks to find baby-clothes and powder in waiting: the nurse's flannel and the mother's breast. Catherine's soul, thrust abruptly into consciousness, demanded food and warmth; the encircling arms of some Divine Motherhood, compassionate towards this feeble, wailing child. Her mind ran here and there, searching desperately for some hint of homeliness, some refuge to which she could fly. She felt the drawing-room tea-table to be impossible, and the conventional headache a lie unworthy of her state.

Then she thought suddenly of a dim and scented church; a great domed place where rough bricks and precious marbles lived happily and simply side by side. There she had gone one day with Paul and Redway, that she might see and feel the power of honourable building, faithful ornament. That visit had scarcely been successful: for Paul, once he stood amongst those stupendous piers and arches,

had been caught by some cold, unearthly passion, forgetting her very existence, entering into silent and intense communion with the spirit of the stones. Jimmy had appeared awkward and uncomfortable, with the air of a man unexpectedly meeting an old acquaintance whom he desires to drop. Catherine, wretchedly placed between these poles of positive and negative enthusiasm, had been forced to concentrate a strictly technical attention upon the distribution of pattern and scale of mosaics.

Now, she remembered a pale cross that hung, as it seemed, in dusky heavens ; and the air of liberty and content with which both priests and people had moved about this place, like children held secure in loving arms. She remembered also women who knelt before the little altars praying openly and with ardour ; others who lit candles and offered them to Our Lady, in order that their dead might have more light. She had thought it very quaint and mediæval. Now she saw it as the one refuge, one home of the wounded heart in a world bitterly inimical to suffering things : the true, eternal Hospital of God.

There, one might shut out the world for a little while, hide in some deep and shadowy recess the maimed and aching thing for which there seemed no room in home or street. She would abandon herself without fear to the tide of the inner life ; weep a little perhaps, receive the queer, inexplicable benediction which those walls had distilled. There, the

new creature within could breathe, find nourishment.

Her hat was lying by the window. She tied it on. Then she looked at the clock, listened a little, and finally opened the door of the room; quickly and furtively, with the air of a prisoner attempting escape.

She met her mother in the hall. Mrs. Alstone had been resting in her room, and was now instinct with the crisp charm of well-dressed and freshly-powdered maturity. One perceived a faint scent of white violets and a copy of the *Woman at Home* half concealed by her fussy sleeves.

'Tea is just going in, dear,' she said. 'Didn't Mr. Vickery stay for it? How tiresome! And I ordered *foie gras* sandwiches. Men always like them best. Come upstairs. You look tired: some food will do you good. I suppose you've been talking design and things all the afternoon.'

'I am going out,' answered Catherine. 'I don't want tea. I can't stand it.'

'Have a cup of cocoatina,' said Mrs. Alstone, anxiously. 'It can be made on the spirit-stove in five minutes. I told cook to let the kitchen fire out; it makes the basement so hot for them. I knew these bun lunches would end in indigestion. You really must diet yourself carefully, and rest in the heat of the day.'

CHAPTER VI

BENEDICTION

'Allor che ben conobbe il galeotto,
Gridò: "Fa, fa che le ginocchia cali:
Ecco l'Angel di Dio: piega le mani:
Omai vedrai di sì fatti offiziali."'
PURG. II. 27.

CATHERINE passed from the hot sunlight, which insulted her by its shameless and inquisitive stare, into a vast cool place. She had hoped for solitude: but it was the hour of Benediction, and she saw dim kneeling forms all about her, and far away in the east innumerable lights. There was a profound silence, a sense of enormous expectancy: and presently the clank of a swinging censer, and a soft white column of smoke that went curling up towards the dome. A faint scent drifted towards her. She was frightened: feeling herself the uninvited, intrusive witness of some mighty incantation, not knowing what might be the esoteric mystery about to be exhibited in this hushed and perfumed place.

She found a chair and a little mat before it; knelt down, and tried to feel devout. There was comfort in the knowledge that she knelt amongst strangers,

far off from the world in which she lived : that none here would observe her attitude with a humiliating astonishment, or carry home amusing reports of their discovery. She raised her head, glanced at the rows of worshippers, all wholly absorbed by the mighty matter in hand. There were some who leaned forward gladly and eagerly, lovers rather than suppliants, beads slipping through their fingers like jewels counted and cast down before Love's feet ; others caught up beyond the plane of ceremony, crouching, awe-struck, with hidden face.

Then the spell was roughly broken. She suddenly perceived Mr. Redway, who sat by one of the pillars. He gazed eastwards, chin on hand, with a fixed and stubborn stare, like a short-sighted man trying to identify objects beyond his focus. Obviously he was not at home, was not entranced ; and at once, by the measure of his evident exclusion from the mysteries, Catherine perceived that she too was shut out, refused. A miracle was being offered : a miracle of healing for those who understood. But she and Jimmy were outsiders ; permitted as lookers-on, impossible as participants. They were offered closed doors, exquisitely decorated, and well-scrubbed steps on which to kneel ; whilst others passed the threshold, entered in to hidden consolations and delights.

It was cruel, unjust. She had behaved well, nobly : had sacrificed her happiness in a manner vaguely reminiscent of the virgin martyrs of the

past. Clearly, she was a fit subject for supernatural consolations. But she knocked, and there was no reply : flung herself against the barrier, and it resisted her attack.

An angry feeling of helplessness overcame her. She saw herself suddenly, alone and very ignorant, amongst great and secret forces whose existence she had scarcely realized until this day. These things were all about her, true and actual. She was teased by a knowledge of their nearness. They were her only refuge, the only justification of her pain.

But she could not attain them alone. She wanted a clue, a guiding hand. Paul might have helped her, for she was assured that he had the key of this kingdom ; but she had unselfishly denied herself his support. She felt herself to be an outcast, an exile for love's sake from that secret city of the soul which now for the first time she apprehended, desired. Yet she was sure that some help, some power, existed, which might lead her—as it had led the happy adepts who knelt before this altar—to its gates. She reached out towards it, in a passionate, wordless prayer.

Then the choir began to sing : and she heard with amazement the inarticulate anthem of her heart caught up, repeated, and made clear.

> '*Salve Regina, Mater misericordiæ :*
> *Vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.*
> *Ad te clamamus, exules filii Hevae ;*
> *Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes, in hac lacrymarum valle.*'

'To thee do we cry in our exile, poor children of Eve! To thee do we lift up our hearts, sighing and weeping in this valley of tears!' This was her need, her impulse. Her heart also was lifted up, in its bewilderment and desolation, towards that great and merciful Mother so passionately, so confidently evoked. And now it seemed that the place was full, not of initiates, but of little weary children; who had crept from the world to these cool, enfolding walls, as to the ever-extended mantle of her love. Catherine wept; and as her tears fell a veil was washed, dissolved, from before her eyes.

When all was over—benediction given, the awful Presence withdrawn—she perceived with a shock that she must leave this place of refuge, go back to an inimical world which now seemed very far away. There was dinner to be faced, with dishes specially selected in the interests of her digestion: and after it the long lonely night, and an endless series of aching, uninteresting days. The recollection of these things awoke anger, spoilt her peace. In such a connection she found them inartistic. Resignation goes ill-clad in evening dress; and a feather fan, though it be mounted in real tortoiseshell, seems an unworthy substitute for the martyr's palm.

She could not go back as she had come, alone with her sense of sacrifice. She needed the approbation, the encouragement of the race. As Redway left his seat, she rose, caught him by the arm, held him.

'Jimmy!' she said, 'Stop! I must speak to you. I'm alone.'

Mr. Redway acquiesced, but without enthusiasm. The nave was nearly empty. One or two women in soft dresses and exquisite hats turned at the doorway, knelt, crossed themselves, and hurried out into the world; taking the Divine Guest, perhaps, to a club debate or afternoon 'At Home.' Presently an acolyte came to the sanctuary, and extinguished, one by one, the altar lights; and at once the red lamp which burns before the tabernacle blazed in the dusk, the living eye of the place. At the end of one long aisle Catherine saw a cluster of yellow stars, like the beacons of some sheltered anchorage. She moved towards them, and Jimmy went with her. She perceived that he knew his way.

She found a little chapel, with walls that curved inwards like caressing arms: felt, though she could hardly see, the enclosing colour of blue, green, and gold mosaics. Then she saw the statue before which the guiding lights were burning; common, guttering candles fixed here and there on the spikes of a rough iron frame. Her taste was shocked by the figure to which they did homage: a coloured plaster image of the Mater Dolorosa, with seven solid if symbolical swords piercing her painted breast. Her contorted features, twisted lips, red-rimmed uplifted eyes, condensed the absurd, grotesque paraphernalia of human agony. Catherine could not reconcile the ugly sincerity of this tormented Mother with the

mystical Queen to whom she had cried in her own dark hour: and, anxious to postpone the moment of explanation, she said to Mr Redway with disgust,

'How *can* they use these crude and hideous things? So vulgar! No one could be impressed.'

He answered: 'I've come to like them best lately. They don't pretend a rivalry with the real.'

Catherine found a low marble ledge which ran round the chapel wall, and sat on it: thus obtaining the effect, without the discomfort, of sitting at Jimmy's feet. She said:

'We're companions here; outside this thing really, both of us, whatever it makes us feel. I don't know why you want to get in. I want to because I am lonely. I've hammered at the doors to-day——'

'Rather painful to the knuckles, isn't it?' said Jimmy. 'Never mind. They will harden in time.'

'Oh, keep your acid tongue quiet!' she exclaimed. 'You shall hear me! You were a priest once, weren't you, or nearly a priest? You know about confession: how it feels, how it comes, how to help? I want to confess now. I'm wretched: I must speak. I can't consume my own poison any more.'

'What have you done?'

'I've sent Paul away.'

'You need no absolution for that.'

'Oh, I know!' she exclaimed. 'You are glad, all of you. You hate me. You think I am his enemy and yours—yes, yours! You want him to be kept

apart for your own sakes, that you may feed on him, live by him. Spiritual vampires, every one of you! He's not to enjoy—not to live—in order that you may be kept up by the strength of his wings. And now I've obeyed, driven him off, and he's gone: gone, do you understand that? The dulness, the emptiness? Every minute makes it worse.'

'Are you asking for an excuse to recall him?'

'Oh, I don't know what I want. I tried to do something big, and it was all right at the moment, and all right here: but I don't feel as though I could go through with it outside all alone. Is not there anything to help one in moments like this? I seem only to want my own way and my own happiness really—something that will give me security and satisfaction—whatever name I call it by.'

'So does everyone else,' said Redway. 'Go on.'

'Some people seem to want self-sacrifice and goodness and things.'

'Only because they enjoy it,' he answered. 'You cannot desire what you don't enjoy: and only a change of heart can make you enjoy right for its own sake.'

'Perhaps,' said Catherine eagerly, 'that may be it: this horrid feeling inside me, that won't let me do what I like. This afternoon I knew that I wanted him; but I couldn't take him, dared not. I was pushed on to send him away. I think I'm changing—growing older—something is happening that is strange.'

She put one hand to her throat, got up, and walked quickly, restlessly, towards the darkened body of the church. The artist within her recollected with pleasure the glacé silk petticoat which she wore under her dress. It swept the tiled floor with a purling, satisfying sound, which roused a dozing verger. He stared at her curiously, and Catherine retreated to the chapel. Redway wondered whether confessions were often like this. He felt awkward, placed thus between the poles of experience: between this girl, whom he thought neurotic and unpleasant, plainly his inferior, and the fragrant, wonderful church, whose glamour he could not escape, whose friendship he was too proud to implore.

She caught his arm, shook it imperatively.

'Oh, what is it I do want? What is it that I've missed?' she said. 'I feel to-night as if all the make-believes had crumbled suddenly, and let in dreadful empty spaces on every side. This confessing is no good really. There's a new creature inside me—the creature that found it so easy to send him away—and it's struggling with the other. Which is right—which is *me*—what has happened?'

'A little incident called conversion,' said Jimmy, 'which occasionally occurs without benefit of clergy. A very ordinary psychological phenomenon, and one quite beyond your control. But it's your chance; take it.'

'No! I don't want to! I want to be happy!' she said. 'Tell me that I may be; tell me I can.'

'How much do you love him ?'

'I can't speak of it.' She knelt down at last, hid her face. This thought compelled reverence. There was silence.

Then she spoke again. 'No ! It is too much. Some things are too hard. I can't do it——'

She looked at the Mater Dolorosa. A candle, flaring suddenly, cast a yellow light on the grey, drawn cheeks, the hideously contorted mouth.

'Horrible,' she muttered, 'to be always as ugly as that !'

Mr. Redway smiled. She turned on him.

'Oh yes ! do laugh !' she exclaimed. 'The whole thing is ridiculous from one point of view. From another, it has some claim to seriousness. Don't you see ? He has done everything for me—everything. And I repay him by this ruinous passion.'

'Leave him.'

'I can't. It's there, it's done. *I'm* there. I ? Oh, there's no *I* left. It is gone, absorbed. He has taken everything, woke me up, done all. What a place I have been brought to ! I can't make my paradise out of his hell.'

'It's a very commonplace method of construction.'

'Oh, but I can't give him up ! Say I cannot—tell me I need not. I'm past pretences, past scheming. People say that a woman holds all the cards : but a woman is the most helpless creature in

the universe when a strong passion has got her. It was all right when I only wanted him; but once you love, you are powerless.'

'A profound remark!' said Jimmy.

'An elemental fact,' she retorted. 'I scream and wriggle; but there are minutes—here, where it is quiet—when I know that it doesn't matter what I do. I am being driven: I can't resist: the end is already decided. I know that I ought to leave him alone: go right away. It is killing his work. He's taught me all, shown me all. Now I understand. I watched him, and grew as I watched. Through him I can be saved, if I choose; if I can endure. But I've spoilt it for him, dragged him down. It is as if I had killed the angel who brought me to the foot of the Mount.'

She sobbed a little, gently and rather prettily. She was getting tired.

'Oh, but I don't want to be saved! I want to be happy,' she whispered.

Redway answered her suddenly:

'If the pilot angel has really brought you to the foot of the Mountain,' he said, 'it was not that you might practise an artistic religion with the assistance of a congenial husband. You are there to suffer. Can't you realize the actual joy that there is in suffering when it is a purifying pain? when the sting of the flame means the burning of bonds? When Dante saw the spirits that the pilot angel brought to Purgatory, d'you remember how glad they were to

be there? how they longed for the cleansing torment? They sang a song of liberation, because they had been made captive by the desire for perfection. *Anime fortunate*, he calls them. They were very happy, and they were going to suffer very much. It is the feeling that makes some women desire child-birth—the mystical satisfaction of voluntary pain. There is an ecstasy in willing torture: it confers immortal possibilities.' He stopped. 'Oh, be glad, Catherine,' he said, 'if the angel has really brought you to the Mountain. There are some of us whom he always leaves behind.'

But Miss Alstone liked to think that she had some pride. Now, having completely abased herself, she bit her lips, tossed her head, and broke into arrogant and nervous laughter.

'What queer, disappointing things we are!' she said. 'We survive a spiritual sickness like this, and die of influenza! And then people like you and Mark expect one to believe in the paramount importance of the soul.'

'An easier theory to believe than the paramount importance of the body,' said Jimmy. 'Whilst you are arguing and entering into rebellion over arrangements for its momentary satisfaction, it is ageing, crumbling, hour by hour. And meanwhile the pageant of death, the pageant of the soul, goes on. No lack of torch-bearers in that procession. Every eight seconds, you know, some citizen of London joins it; goes to 'his own place.'

He took her by the shoulders, and looked at her with kindness.

'See here, Catherine,' he said, 'you showed courage to-day. Don't waste it. Go away; give yourself space; stand back where you can see your design. Go to Letty. She's ill—dying, I think—right away in the country alone. No artifice there to confuse you: just the inevitable things. Watch her; square yourself from that brink—the only place from which you can see the *lacrymarum vallis* as a landscape, a whole——'

'Letty?' she said, '*Dying?* I can't conceive it!'

'Yes,' said Jimmy, 'dying. Oh, not yet, perhaps; I am trying, in our ridiculous way, to keep her as long as I can. Coffins go oddly with curly hair, do they not? But we must all die, you know, even the most absurd of us. That is an honour of which even modern sanitation is powerless to deprive its prisoners in the end.'

CHAPTER VII

THE GREAT GATE

'A time to be born, and a time to die ; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted ; a time to kill, and a time to heal ; a time to break down, and a time to build up.'—ECCLES. III. 2, 3.

MRS. ALSTONE encouraged, with an eagerness not wholly altruistic, Catherine's sudden inclination towards country life, landscape painting, and absence from home. The season was at its height. She instantly projected a musical 'At Home' and two dinners, knowing that in her daughter's absence the excellence of her entrées more than condoned the deficiencies of her conversation. She murmured to herself : 'Soles with banana sauce would be very new,' and then turned with motherly interest to her child's immediate needs.

'You have looked so white lately, Catherine,' she said, 'that I am sure you require a change ; and, of course, there is no need for artistic people to wait till after Goodwood. But do be wise and choose an agricultural county, not some dreadful moorland place. The atmospheric effects are just as good, and the butter and eggs far better.'

'I am going to stay with Letty Herford.'

'The peculiar little woman who does altar-cloths?' said Mrs Alstone. 'You would find that very interesting, I should think. But don't let her keep you indoors all day; people who go in for fancy work are very stuffy, as a rule.'

One may pity Catherine, that small and self-important thing caught by mighty forces, as she set out upon her solitary pilgrimage. A short skirt, a sketching outfit, and six cotton blouses are ineffectual unguents for the healing of a hopeless love.

One sees her, clearly conscious of her own differentiation from the unfeeling herd of holiday-makers; yet hardly distinguishable amongst the hundred souls enmeshed in every crevice of the many-jointed train, which carried them, as a serpent carries its parasites, in long loops and swift dashes across the land. These persons were going to Lulworth, Weymouth, Swanage. They were accompanied by biscuit-tins, bathing implements, and packets of a vague substance called literature. Their children rioted in the corridor, waving spades and buckets. *She* was going to Purgatory. She understood now the self-gratulation of those souls whom the angel selected for that perilous and purifying voyage, as they bade farewell to their companions, left in unspiritual safety at an Italian seaside resort.

The train stopped now and then, and there was a dumping of families of somnambulists, who would certainly have felt dread and amazement had they

been wholly conscious of their transmigrations: brought suddenly from smoke, stucco, and simplicity, to the infinite complications of natural things. A soft hot wind came through the window, bringing exquisite and indistinguishable scents. Ox-eye daisies grew in tufts near the line. Through little slated stations one caught sight of new-made roads, old matronly trees, thick hay-fields that resisted the pushing fingers of Progress to the last.

She heard her fellow-passengers speak to one another of country joys. A voice said,

'Thank goodness! Percy and the boys have got their bikes. I shall pack them off in the morning, and sit on the esplanade with a book. That's *my* idea of a holiday.'

Her neighbour replied, 'Yes, and good books are so cheap now, aren't they, dear? You can get nearly all Mrs. Henry Wood's at fourpence-halfpenny, and even one or two of Hall Caine's.'

A male voice interrupted, 'You've got to thank the spread of education for that, Carrie, and don't you forget it! Bless you! fifty years ago literature wasn't appreciated as it is now. No cheap editions of Huxley and Hæckel then, to show the great mass of the people what they really are. But a sound progressive policy, in spite of Tory obstructionists—— '

The first speaker exclaimed, 'Now, Percy, if you want to talk politics, you must go into a smoking compartment. You know that it always makes my head ache on a journey: but there you go,

arguing away all the time, just as if this carriage was your horrid Radical club, and never think that other people want a rest.'

Miss Alstone was slightly comforted by the obvious inferiority of her travelling companions; but she felt very lonely, caught and held in a world which supported so impossible a population. She looked through the window, at the scampering foreground of fields and hedges, the distant woods which slid slowly away. There, she felt, was her home and consolation. She saw long stretches of country, and a hill lifted a very little way from the flatness; as if by the slow breathing of the earth. It was all cut into shapes: brown ploughed bits, vivid blue-green patches where turnips grew, and vague indeterminate land towards the horizon. A little path left the railway, and went quickly away. Where? She did not know. To the edge of the world, perhaps; beyond those great curves of infinite, undulating earth which fringed the universe, making modern science seem a fantasy, and Ptolemy the only realist.

With the accumulation of these poignant sights, the ache within grew, cried out, declared itself suddenly as hunger which approached the limit of starvation. Paul was the natural head of all these desirable wonders: the incarnation, for her, of that spirit which looked out from the eyes of the flowers, to which she stretched empty, eager hands. He was of them and in them. The sunlight, even

the grave sincerity of the trees, seemed to reflect his personality, aroused the same image in her heart.

From a platform that called itself a station, where three milk-cans and a muzzled puppy awaited the London train, Miss Alstone at last set out upon an actual pilgrim's way. She felt herself indeed in Saint Hubert's footsteps when she forsook the high-road and her barrow full of luggage for a short and solitary cut through copse and fields.

She went by the border of a thick soft hedge, where bees hung, entranced, above a scented forest of woodruff and meadow-sweet. The perfume and silence woke a new sense within her; so that she perceived behind the branches wonderful personalities, that stood waist deep in the turf, and peeped out upon the trespasser. She walked in the midst of an enormous population, which everywhere gave earnest of an ecstatic, abounding life: in the hush that comes with sunshine, her soul could detect the tiny movements of its being. It gave her no welcome. She was unhappy, and natural things hate that. The banner of love was erect in the meadows; leaves and blossoms moved one with another in the rhythmic measure of some incantatory dance. But Catherine passed in solitude through that pageant of satisfied desire, which all the world was playing on this hot and silent afternoon.

A long thin spray of wild roses reached out towards her and nodded, as if to say, 'Do not forget

us. We are real as the lilies—as true a symbol of life.'

A very gentle wind crept along the hedgerow, and shook perfume from the meadow-sweet.

In each little weed she saw preparations for a mystical marriage going forward. The country and the hour had decked themselves to do honour to the initiate of love: but they received only a miserable spinster, mourning her own choice of sterility.

The masque of wild roses went on; a mocking invitation to the insurgent animal within. Catherine felt that she could tear the heart from this beauty of vitality. The revels of creation brought on the pangs of barrenness; the sense of exile and loss. She saw an Alderney cow that licked the face of its calf with evident pleasure. It moved away, as if from some alien thing, when she approached it. She was deeply and ridiculously wounded by its demeanour: the hard tears that hurt the eyes came reluctantly to the surface and brimmed over. But even the added interests of a headache and a damp handkerchief did not help her to forget.

She laughed at the quaint spiritual hopes with which Jimmy had sent her out upon this pilgrimage. It was very evident to her that a world which held unhappy love affairs must necessarily be destitute of God. The divinity of the young has many names; but when Psyche lights the candle, he is generally discovered to be Eros in disguise.

Then she came to the farmhouse, and to Letty,

who waited for her in the garden. The gate shrieked, Mrs. Herford ran forward, and Catherine saw, in one dreadful glance, the shrouded skeleton peep out from the eternal child. In her refusal of life, she had scarcely considered the actuality of death: the corroding action incessantly at work behind those flowery splendours of fertility that had maddened and bewitched. She felt that it made a great deal of difference. As all was so evidently over for Letty; so, very soon, it might be for her, for Paul. All his ardours and ideals could not keep him from the grave. The church that began as a love-child would end as a sepulchre.

She, too, would shrink slowly out of life, with ever-increasing wrinkles and hideousness, as vitality receded and the poor stretched skin fell back upon the bones. At last, through horrors that she dared not contemplate, she would shrink to a very little dust. It was no sudden accident, it was happening all the while; and all the while, new things were coming to birth, eating up the short banquet of youth, and going out to die. There was obviously no time to waste.

* * * * *

Mrs. Herford lay uncomfortably upon two chairs, propped up by countryfied cushions of crazy patchwork and Turkey twill. She wore white nainsook sleeves over her blouse, and a working overall with pockets. This apparatus of industry, which harmonized ill with her exhausted little body, had its

justification. There was a skein of fine thread in her lap, a bit of some semi-transparent stuff stretched on a small tambour frame before her. She put in a few careful stitches now and then.

She said to Catherine, who watched her, 'I always wanted my last bit to be a chalice veil: you see, it's the most intimate of all.'

Then she saw fear and embarrassment on her companion's face, and added quickly, 'Lots of time yet, you know, dearie: only I work so slowly now that I thought it was safer to begin. I shan't die whilst you're here if I can help it. So nasty for you: you're too young.'

'I think you are a little stronger to-day.'

'Oh no,' said Letty eagerly; 'I hope not! I don't want to turn back, you know.'

'Oh, stay as long as you can!' exclaimed Catherine. 'Life's so horribly short: and you can never have it again.'

'What a funny idea, counting the days like that!' answered Mrs. Herford. 'Just like people at the seaside, who get so fond of the niggers and bathing that they hate having to go home; as if home wasn't really the best! And anyhow, life *is* only temporary lodgings, isn't it? Like these rooms, which are so nice and symbolic, I think.'

She looked round the parlour. There was a rose-wood table, with pink and white crochet-mats upon it, and several books: a copy of *M.A.P.*, Saint Teresa's 'Castles of the Soul,' a red-edged

volume of devotions, called 'A Little Manual of Holiness.' Catherine's easel and a few unfinished sketches were huddled in one corner. Miss Alstone had soon given up all attempt to paint summer landscape. Painting entails close observation, and close observation of natural things increased her pain.

Two white china dogs, with brown spots and gold collars, stood on the mantelpiece, beneath a steel engraving of Queen Victoria's marriage, and a large stuffed fish in a glass case.

'I love those dogs,' said Letty. 'They seem to be gazing and gazing at something which other people don't see. They always remind me of Mr. Vickery, because of course he does just that.'

Catherine said rather wearily, 'I wonder. The things that are visible seem more than enough, once one learns to see them.'

'Oh no, ducky,' replied Mrs. Herford. 'They wouldn't *be* like that if there wasn't something else, you know; just as we shouldn't have dreams if we weren't going to wake up afterwards. And Mr. Vickery isn't fast asleep like the rest of us. He dozes, of course; but he opens his eyes now and then, and sees the real. I've often felt just on the edge of it too, haven't you? At Mass, sometimes, I know the very moment when the angels come in. It's just before the Sanctus, as a rule, except in Masses for the Dead. Then they are there all the time; which is so lovely, I think. And I keep feeling

as if I must see them, they are so obvious and near. It's silly to be blind to one's best friends. Sometimes, when the sun has come out suddenly, I've said, "Ah! here they are." But one never does see them, after all. *He* does. He's not got to wait until he gets out of the dream.'

'Ah, Paul! He's different; he's real!'

'Yes, dearie; but so you are now.'

'Real? I'm too real!' said Catherine. 'If only I could be sham again, as I used to be, and not know anything about life! How lovely it was when I thought technique important, and all that!'

'Yes, I know just how that feels. Pinafores and bibs were very comfy; they kept your frocks tidy. And it's a horrid minute when you have to leave them off and haven't quite got to the grown-up things. But you can't go back, once you have started growing; once the tucks have been let out. And you've started: you're changing. I think sometimes that Mr. Vickery has built up something in you; is building it, bit by bit.'

'Oh, if only he hadn't! I can't bear it. I am crushed by the weight of the stones.'

'Well, I don't know much about love affairs,' said Letty; 'but I dare say they are very good for us, even earthly ones. Of course, one knows that a husband is a sacrament. I always looked upon George like that. Even when he was a little disappointing, one felt he meant something else very splendid: and afterwards one found——'

She stopped abruptly, put one hand to her bosom, pressed it hard against her blouse. She held her lips together tightly, as if afraid that she might cry by mistake. Catherine jumped up.

'You're ill!' she exclaimed. 'Oh, *what* have I got to do?'

Mrs. Herford did not answer. She lay quite still, and Catherine watched her helplessly. In a little while, her face relaxed, as if some secret anodyne had been administered. She whispered very softly:

'*It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled.*'

Catherine went hastily to fetch water, but when she returned Letty had resumed her work: the incident, apparently, was at an end. Mrs. Herford was busy for some minutes with a subtle piece of outline. Presently she spoke, as if in continuation of her last remarks.

'You know, ducky,' she said, 'when your body gets thin you see clearer. I know now that the really important things for me were the ceremonies, not the human relations. They mattered; for me, anyhow. They were my symbols. Perhaps the others may be yours. Oh, stick to your symbol, Cathie, when you have found it!'

'Symbols are often so foolish!'

'Yes, dear, I know,' said Letty eagerly, 'But being absurd is so good for us, and it amuses other

people as well. And one ought to be amusing if one possibly can, I think: even if the only way is being silly. Silly people get saved too; get out of the dream in the end. I think clever girls often don't understand that.'

She looked at Catherine, a quaint, appealing expression on her birdlike face. 'But do go out now, ducky,' she said, 'and get a nice run before sunset. Sunsets give one such lovely homey feelings, I think. And I'm going to do my evening meditation.'

Catherine went out. Letty's manner had alarmed her, and induced a cowardly longing for support and companionship. She was determined to summon Redway at once, and walked the two miles to the telegraph-office at a humiliatingly rapid pace. She dared not risk a *tête-à-tête* with death.

When she turned homewards, the sun had gone. That hour was at hand in which earth lies black against a white and lucent sky; and the true sweep of the hills, the writhing outline of the rocks—all the bare bones of reality, freed from the cloak of colour—start astonishingly to life. From the dark hedges, elder-bushes, all over white full-moons of things, stared at her with curiosity. In the shadowed fields animals moved softly to and fro. They came up out of the dusk suddenly, stealthily, as fabulous creatures might creep on us from another dimension; dropping, as the light went, their familiar air of comfortable servitude, and taking on an alien and primeval life. The white scratches of civilization

had been washed from this dark slate. Catherine walked with strange companions. Centaurs, she fancied, might browse beneath the elms at such an hour.

Presently she came to a turn in the road, and saw the moon low in the sky: not the frost-white goddess of chastity, but a dim and tawny invitation to unimaginable ardours and sterile loves. She thought that she could detect strange rings of colour about it—violet, orange, and red—like the evil aura that goes with a corrupt and potent personality. A little cold breeze came up suddenly behind her from the west, where clouds lay thickly. The sleeping trees woke, shivered, and said, 'Hush-sh-sh.' It died away, and there was an intense silence; the silence of suspense.

She noticed, then, her solitude in this strange and moon-washed world, where the actual earth seemed so much more real and alive than its inhabitants; than the thin veil of herbage which hid its terrible face. She longed for human companionship, understanding abruptly that panic influence which sends sheep scuttering down the hillside when the night is very still. She, too, wished to run, and restrained herself with an effort. She was very glad when she saw the farmhouse, pleasant in its solidity, appear against the sky.

She entered the dark parlour, and said 'Letty!' very softly, in case Mrs Herford might have fallen asleep She was glad when she received no reply,

having heard that 'Sleep is Nature's own restorative.' A little moonlight filtered through the window, and by it she presently perceived Letty's figure; its uneasy pose, with one arm dangling helplessly, the head fallen back. She feared a fainting fit, lit one candle quickly, went to the couch.

Mrs. Herford lay with mouth slightly open, eyes half-closed. Catherine tried to move her. She was strong, her patient thin and light; therefore the weight of this body upon her arm filled her with astonishment. It had a strange dull softness, alien to all that she knew of the qualities of human flesh. In its presence she felt alone, far away from the rest of the world. She was frightened; tried to shake it, but it was too heavy. With an effort, she turned it on one side, and by the light of her single candle began to tear nervously and unsteadily at the fastenings of overall and bodice. Still Mrs. Herford did not awake.

Presently the overall was pulled clumsily from the unyielding shoulders, the blouse and flannel underbodice were undone. Further investigation seemed hardly necessary, for Catherine knew now that she ministered to an empty, cast-off shell: that Letty had gone away out of the dream, and that she was left in it, terrified and confused. She wondered what that moment of awakening had been like.

She remembered Letty's very happy whisper when the warning came—'*It is the voice of my beloved.*' Its cadence was familiar to her. She had

learnt from Mr. Gwent, in her early days of spiritual curiosity, that the Song of Solomon contained the secret of all the mysticism in the world. Of late she had found there only the interpretation of her own torment; for the books of inspiration are magical vessels, which pour out a libation of wine for the captains of the spirit and of gall for the slaves of sense. Another of its phrases came back to her: '*My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.*'

'Come away? Where from? From life, from earth? I never will! It's cruel: it's vile!' she cried.

She looked round the darkened room, anxiously and furtively, as if she feared the neighbourhood of malicious demons already plotting for her death. She lifted her candle, and saw with horror two white patches start from the wall. Then she recognised them as the china dogs upon the mantelshelf. Letty now enjoyed their privilege of gazing upon the things that other people do not see. Certainly they wore a curious air to-night. But they *were* only dogs. She laughed, remembering their gilt chains and silly faces. She was proud to find that she could still laugh.

The touch of physical pain is the touch of reality. As she proceeded, almost mechanically, with the loosening of Letty's garments, her fingers came on some sharp metallic thing that tore the skin. She was recalled to a consideration of her own comfort,

drew away her hand very carefully, and brought the candle nearer that she might have light at her work.

Then she saw Mrs. Herford's mutilated bosom: the scars upon it, the half-healed wounds, the discoloured skin: and then the spiked chain which lay upon her neck, and the heavy image which hung from that chain, and held it tight against the flesh. There was also the little blood-stained pad of cotton stuff which had hidden her secret from the world.

At once, as she looked, the remembrance of another wound rushed back on Catherine; Paul's scarred wrists as he had held them towards her on the day of renouncement. That self-torture was the last wild effort towards liberty of a passionate idealist whom she had twisted from his path: this austere suffering had been the cherished, hidden comrade of a chattering, self-forgetful little fool.

Miss Alstone had heard of the stigmata, of the cruciform mark, and other evidences of pathological piety. But this horrible instrument recalled no emblem of the Passion; meant nothing, unless one can attribute a meaning to ceaseless pain. Jimmy had said, 'There is an ecstasy in willing torture.' That horrible image of the Grieving Mother had been loved and worshipped because of the sword in her heart. It was all very strange.

She had followed Saint Hubert's way to the bitter end: to the crucified Victim, and the intolerable choice. This was its goal; death, torment. But Letty had followed another, a secret way, which

left the familiar comprehensible world, as the little path that left the railway-line, and led—where? Perhaps to that great Adventure of God to which the other quest is but a pathway of approach. Catherine envied her. Her ardent temperament burned for this experience, as it had done in the past for excitement and success. She remembered Letty's childish gaiety, her exquisite stitches and absurd metaphors; looked at that maimed bosom, and felt the sense of indelicate intrusion which is apt to overtake us when we discover sudden truths about our friends.

A drop of blood fell from her own wounded finger whilst she looked. She thought of its warmth, of the vitality in it, and of the cooling flesh which it must fall. A bit of her soul went with it on this little journey. When the red splash appeared on Letty's breast, bright against the duller marks of her completed discipline, she screamed.

The landlady rushed in then: lights were brought, and with them a horrible confusion of practical considerations, appropriate pieties, and latent annoyance. One does not like a death in one's house so early in the season: subsequent lodgers are apt to suspect the drains.

Many vague and unimportant minutes passed: farm-hands were summoned, messengers sent out. Catherine, meanwhile, gazed steadfastly and hungrily at the face of the dead. There were many questions that she wished to ask Letty now. She had covered up the tortured bosom again, and as yet no one

had disturbed it. She whispered to herself perpetually :

'Out of the dream ! Out of the dream !'

The landlady touched her arm. 'Come, miss,' she said ; 'that's long enough, or we shall have you poorly to-morrow. You can't do nothing for the poor lady now.'

Catherine turned on her. 'May I not look forward a little ? Am I expected to faint ?' she asked with disdain.

The woman was frightened, and shrank away.

CHAPTER VIII

THE QUEEN OF THE AIR

'Thy fate and mine are sealed;
I strove against the stream, and all in vain.
Let the great river take me to the main.'

TENNYSON.

CATHERINE awoke from profound sleep to find rain beating like sand against her windows; and looked out on a white sky, and on the fringed banners of the trees as they waved in the air, the superb standards of an element in revolt.

The haloed moon had been a harbinger of storm. The house shook under the assault of the wind: it came with furious sallies and angry tears. Catherine felt intimate with this rain-swept and colourless world—lifted by its vehemence into some swift and formless life—and thanked the skies for an outbreak which she could not allow to herself. It all seemed wild, mournful, and appropriate; stirring the pulses to an inarticulate rebellion, like the winds of life that beat hopelessly against the impregnable fortress of death.

It was Sunday morning. She heard, above the

cries of the gale, the 'Come—come—come' of the church bell. It had an absurdly domestic intonation; more indicative, she thought, of the roast sirloin at one-thirty than of the supernatural banquet at eleven o'clock.

She dressed and descended to the parlour; astonished to find herself yielding, in this hopeless, incredible world of passion and decay, to the common process of life. Bracing herself for the sight of a breakfast-table on which one cup and saucer and a solitary egg would give an accent of squalid realism to the dreadful drama of the night, she met instead the very actual form of Redway, whom her telegram had brought by the midnight train.

All the grotesque business of coffin and grave was already in hand; the vicarious resignation of the landlady, the hardly-restrained excitement of house and dairy-maids. Redway was civil and impassive. He did not encourage condolences; and Catherine eyed him with apprehension, wondering whether he had discovered his sister's secret yet. There was little for her to do, unless to avoid him as much as she might. She wandered up and down the house, the storm and the dead working in her side by side. The swaying branches of the trees, the slanting, rushing rain—wind and water coming together, with a hiss that made a witches' cauldron of the world—roused her to an unendurable restlessness. The broken machinery of Letty's life, laid out upstairs with such useless ceremony, misplaced deference,

urged her to use her own apparatus of motion before it, too, ran down to its inevitable end.

At midday the gale increased, and a chimney fell with a hurly-burly of brick-ends and dust into the yard. As the sight of a stranger's peril, reminding one abruptly of the insecurity of things, will arouse terror and anxiety for the safety of our own beloved ; so, by this accident, Catherine was reminded of the Four Crowned Saints, its scaffolded porch and uncompleted pinnacles doubtless left by the workmen, on Saturday night, with little defence against such summer storms as this. She had given her life and hope for this church and Paul's duty towards it. So had he. It was their child : the son of abnegation. The thought of it filled her with hatred and love. In its hour of danger she could not stay away from it. It called, as the dead repelled, insistently, imperiously ; provided an objective on which her immediate need of action could sate itself.

She wondered a little why she had to go ; why the Dweller in the Innermost no longer gave a suggestion, but a command. It drove in the spur deeper and deeper as she hesitated, argued with herself. Its voice in her ear said : ' Live—live—live !' The gale outside answered : ' Come—come—come !'—but not with a domestic intonation.

She was glad to have the hard, long walk to the station, charging, head down, against the lances of the rain ; glad to see the wide brown pools in the

roadway, thick with its cruel circles, each killing the other as they came to birth. She exulted in her own impotence: in the dominion of that invisible Queen of the Air which seized upon soul and body; carried them on irresistible wings; urged, buffeted, possessed her.

Thus, wet, storm-tossed, yet full of a curious satisfaction, as of one who knows herself to be governed by fate and therefore freed from all sense of responsibility, Catherine went to London. The storm went with her; or, as she thought, she with it, held and carried in its heart.

* * * * *

Nevertheless, it outpaced her; and, leaving behind those ecstatic cries and murmurs with which the tempest and the woodlands meet, it swept down upon London, rushed moaning through the sepia streets as through a great Æolian harp.

It woke in Paul Vickery's heart an answering music, an answering anxiety. The chambers of his soul had been swept and garnished, so that Catherine might enter in. But she, to his amazement, had refused the invitation; and the winds of passion now stormed through those empty rooms with hungry voices that never ceased their clamour, never found their prey.

But there was no wailing note in the gale outside his windows. That was too strong, too hurried, to be sorrowful. It seemed to Paul fierce and full of desire; tearing the heart from the earth as it passed

over it, and rushing on towards further, unimaginable satisfactions. He thought it very happy, for it blew where it listed ; had violence, and liberty to exert that violence. Where would it appease its hunger ? At once he thought of his church, empty and alone ; of some loose and heavy planks that lay upon the staging, and of two images set up for his criticism in the porch the day before and left uncovered. It was no longer for him the home of angels : they had abandoned it. Nevertheless, he was pledged to watch over it, keep it intact and in safety, as we are bound to dust and cherish the empty chambers of our dead. He felt the arid responsibilities of one who tends a mausoleum, and fetched Inverness cape and gaiters with a certain dreary sense of satisfaction in his own correct behaviour.

Look now at the twisting, teeming earth ; and at these two scraps of sentient stuff, blown by diverse winds towards their little heap of stones.

One sees the dripping world, across which the rain is blown in clouds, as watery dust before some celestial broom : and the church standing alone, brown and very sombre, for architecture detests the wet. Its natural home is heaven, where heavenly weather is the rule. One sees the Feltham Linication Factory, its glazed bricks shining in the rain ; and the great network of mean neat streets around it, the web by which the industrial spider lives and works. Beyond, the greater, meaner web

of London: a blur in the midst of the green earth.

One sees—but with a concentration of vision, for they are hardly to be noticed amidst the apparatus of this immense and careless life—our two poor children on their way: forced by some inflexible Power, he down, she up, to the level at which they can contribute to the process of things. Behind this shadow-show, the radiant landscape of the pattern-land and its peoples; indifferent alike to our variable weather, paste-board cities, and self-important civilizations. They pass in and through the filmy structures of red-brick flats and terra-cotta palaces, the weary earth, perforated by electrified rabbit-runs, the moving spectres of hansom-cab and motor omnibus—spiritual projections every one of them—which we think almost distressingly material facts. Hidden by our ugly idea of things, they tread their everlasting fields, and tend the ever-living flame with ecstasy and adoration: looking now and then—perhaps with pity and certainly with amusement—at the quaint sorrows and complications of the earth, as we look in at the nursery-door, to smile a little at the important airs, mimic passions, incurable griefs of its inhabitants.

Paul Vickery, walking in the midst of this dual world, blind to the reality and disdainful of the dream, felt himself cut off from life, refused. He could not build, for he no longer perceived the country in which he had laid his foundations; and

the mere heaping up of stones in a world of illusion was like one of those senseless labours undertaken in nightmare, which are obliterated as soon as we awake. He was not loved. There seemed no link between him and any endurable form of existence.

The shining pavement and the pale grey sky each gave back to him a separate image of intolerable loneliness. There were few people in the streets. Here and there a housemaid in muslin and mackintosh; regretful of her draggled skirts, but bent at all costs on having her Sunday afternoon. One or two fathers of families, who fled to the public house as outlaws to sanctuary. Paul hated them. Their hands were against him, he was sure.

He was glad to leave the streets for the muddy precinct of the Four Crowned Saints. The lonely of heart are more comfortable when their solitude is complete. He entered the outer court, and perceived, without surprise, the wreck of some fallen staging before the entrance. Coming to the porch, half-blinded by rain, he stumbled against broken stone-work. The evidence of disaster did not displease him. It would have been odd, unsuitable, if his broken spirit had not found its architectural equivalent in waiting.

Then he looked down, and saw at his feet the fragments of the Queen of Beauty, knocked by falling scaffolding from her position above the central door. The hooded face, broken from its neck, lay in the mud, and gazed vacantly—helplessly—into

heaven. He saw, for the first time without their veil of dignifying shadow, the brow and eye-sockets; left unfinished because invisible from below. They were inhuman in their shapelessness; seemed to belong to some obscure, unbearable race of creatures that were less yet more than men. As he looked at them, he received a horrible impression of squalid tragedy, ineffectual ruin. He remembered the exquisite moment in which he had posed Catherine for the Queen of Beauty; and the blank stare of this amorphous doll became terrible to him. He fled into the church.

There were three round windows in the wall of the apse. Paul had filled them with white glass, believing that the rising and the setting sun should be allowed to shine upon the mysteries without impediment. They shone now with an ashy brilliance, alien from sunlight; three eyes of accusation in the dusk. His beloved place, whence he had so often stepped over to the Better Land; where he had hoped that the air of that country should be entrapped, made breathable by all; was incredibly dreary, empty, desolate. It might have been a warehouse or a school. Once, the saints in the windows had shown themselves inimical to him; now they were indifferent, and he did not care.

He hated the blank space where the altar should be; it was a symbol of past opportunity, present impotence. He had created a superb approach to an empty shrine. There one should find love, a

real and imperishable love, some consolation for these dreadful earthly loves gone wrong. But he loved nothing now; neither his work nor its pattern. There was only one image that he desired to place upon the altar of his heart.

A gust of wind entered with him, for it still blew strongly from the west. It swept the aisles with a curious booming cry, and returned to swing the plank door noisily upon its hinges, and close it at last with a bang. At that, Paul saw in the choir a white patch that started up and moved uncertainly, surreptitiously, to and fro; like a trapped thing which does not know where to hide. Then he perceived wet footprints at his feet, and then a cloak flung down near the door. Immediately he knew his companion, and was afraid: tried to think coherently, but only succeeded in realizing how much of the helpless animal there is in man, especially at those moments when he would like others to see in him the captain of his soul.

He took a step forward, and paused. Whilst the white patch drew him across the church, he knew it to be dangerous; and hesitated, as the serpent might do before it strikes the rabbit which will certainly give it indigestion. It was all dim, improbable, uncertain, like a dream; the great bare windy church, the rain that beat upon it, the wrecked symbol at the door, and the woman, far away in the east, vaguely perceptible, tormented, and provocative.

Then he saw her sink down and remain motionless, as if resistance were spent; the paralyzed animal waiting for its fate. At once he became the hunter; perhaps rather the beast of prey. There is little difference between them. He saw, still in that curious dream which had taken the place of life, the space between them diminish: found himself upon the great flight of steps which led to the sanctuary, forced up them by some friendly, irresistible power. He was breathing deeply, quickly. His body trembled with each breath, as the church trembled under the gale.

Then he was in the choir, on its pavement; felt the porch and the nave to be far away, below, behind him; saw Catherine and her limp and mud-stained skirts, which, seen from a distance, looked so very white. She lay prostrate in the holiest place of all: at the spot prepared for the altar, between those four sculptured columns, with their priestly and angelic processions, their symbols of adoration and of sacrifice, on which Mark Gwent had lavished his wildest fancies, his most exquisite dreams.

The church was very dark: but it, or his brain, was full of the strangest noises. He felt the power of the gale about him. It lifted him and bore him on its wings; eastwards, but not within reach of those pale and dreadful windows. They might seize and draw him into some icy, immaterial world, from which one would never escape. Per-

haps they had frightened Catherine. He hated them for that. But he was there: he was with her; all was well. The cold and cruel stones, her rivals, should never hurt her any more.

* * * * *

Whilst he still held her closely, she said to him, in the ecstasy of her surrender,

'*How could I know that I had got to fail?*'

CHAPTER IX

INTERMEZZO

'What was that which was lost?'
'The genuine secrets of a Master Mason.'
Ritual of the Third Degree.

In an unstable world, where even our diseases are impermanent, a few things still remain which never change. One is our capacity for reading rubbish and talking about literature; another the inextinguishable importance of a mother whose daughter is going to be married. Catherine's engagement revived in Mrs. Alstone the natural domesticity which her unnatural æsthetics had held in check. She made woollen lace for her daughter's flannel petticoats whilst she entertained poets at tea, and obtained bewildering advice upon the trousseau from artists, actresses, and advocates of dress reform.

'Nice underclothing,' said Mrs. Alstone, 'a young wife *must* have. She requires it. And I always determined that my girl should go to her husband with at least two dozen of everything; even night socks. Of course, Paul is artistic, and

cares very little about style in dress: but I am getting her two nice dressing-gowns from Liberty, which he will like, and her wedding-dress will be short-waisted—such a becoming style to slender figures with long backs. I'm really glad that Paul takes no interest in the nude, for dear Catherine has always worn corsets. Many painters are extremely tiresome about that. So selfish!'

Within the walls of the Four Crowned Saints, the situation was less popular. Vickery and Catherine, shamefaced souls within triumphant bodies, worked feverishly. She with an ever-increasing sense of her own smallness and blindness, vaguely aware now of great powers and enormous experiences which she could not perceive. He, at war with his own ungrateful manhood, which, refusing to be satisfied with love, clamoured perpetually for possession.

He hardly missed the Better Country, for his senses now showed to him a new, odd, iridescent earth, full of complicated images, which charmed the intellect and drugged the soul. Life seemed to be no more made up of the safe and homely stuff of the hours, as his dreaming and working days used to be. It was now by turns glorious and humiliating. Glorious, when Catherine was with him, when he felt the subtle responses of a spirit growing daily nearer to his own. Humiliating, when the base fancies, jealousies, and selfishnesses which hang on the train of passion, made their squalid presence felt.

It disgusted him to find that some inhabitant of his being resented the existence of all other men in a world which contained himself and Catherine; that he was jealous of her work, of every object that she looked upon, of the pleasure that she took in abstract things. He longed perpetually to touch her, and that also annoyed him. He would have wished his love to be an ecstacy independent of contact; instead, the tie of betrothal had but knotted the bonds of sense. He began to have wild dreams, terrible fancies. The reaction from austerity was violent and complete. Like many persons of deliberately immaculate life, he had forfeited the old human power of taking passion sanely. It lit up the sins of sense with a dazzling, confusing light; till he saw in them a mystical purity, a higher and paradoxical innocence.

He tried very hard to show some hint of this, as he thought, original philosophy to his confused and irritated workers. They were like mariners left alone with a compass whose ever-increasing variations they were unable to calculate or correct. Paul, for them, had long pointed true north, held them to a course which they could never have followed alone. Now they saw the needle swing restlessly from pole to pole: and felt themselves to be injured by that soft iron of sentiment which had so evidently disturbed its guiding powers.

Only Mr. Feltham was pleased. 'A smart girl,' he said. 'And Cathie *is* smart as well as artistic,

always brings out the best there is in a chap. Really, at one time Vickery had a prejudice against nice, rich colour and plenty of pattern and so on, which was positively Evangelical. I'm very glad he's coming round. The church will be all the better for it, and so will his future career.'

Miss Brewster felt it to be fortunate at this time that the sharpness of well-ground chisels and the amenable nature of seasoned oak gave to her hands a power of expression which civility forbade to her tongue. She watched and worked; and the grotesques which upheld the arms of her choir stalls assumed an ironic air, which she knew that Redway, if no other, would appreciate. His long absence, if excusable, had been astonishingly tiresome. She missed him. Even the most independent depend on their dependents a good deal.

Jimmy presently returned to his work; very moody, very industrious.

'Well,' he said, 'Vickery is engulfed, and we are left again to our own resources. Where are we?'

Emma replied: 'On the road.'

'Without a leader.'

'The greater the virtue if we find our way.'

'He has lost his, that's certain.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Gwent, joining them. 'It is a pity. I doubt whether he will recover in time, though he may in eternity. There are some who must lose their way before they can find it; but the

glory of that discovery, when it comes, will more than atone for the initial humiliation. One may obtain some comfort from the further consideration that the husbands of this world will probably be the bachelors of the next.'

Redway said: 'He may get over this—burn his way through it—and go back.'

'You cannot go back on that path.'

'Why not? You can go back to past loves.'

'But not to past purity!' exclaimed Mark. 'Had Our Lady been Saint Joseph's wife, do you think that subsequent widowhood would have made her a suitable agent of the Incarnation? Vickery may lose that which he has found, but he will never find that which he has lost.'

'He will see it, if he mayn't touch it.'

'Where?'

'In Catherine.'

'You find her changed?'

'Changing,' replied Emma. She took a small gouge, and cut melancholy furrows on the brow of a little devil which had looked very jolly a moment before.

'The spirit of French fiction,' she observed. 'We want all the arts to be represented here, don't we?'

With each touch, each chip that fell, the impression of a sad prisoner struggling to the surface became more clearly defined. 'See?' she said presently. 'There is an angel in each of us: but

its twin brother, the devil, must surrender or be cut out, before it can come to its own. That's the worst of it. In the end it is generally the knife. Earth-air doesn't agree with our angels. They are always anæmic, and the devils uncommonly robust. Catherine's devil, I fancy, is going to be chipped out bit by bit.'

'Yes,' answered Redway. 'That may be it. She is one of those who get deeper and deeper into love the longer they go on: a painful process. She began to find herself; and then, she lost herself. The great surrender.'

'And he,' said Emma, 'like all idealists, lives with special intensity on the sensual plane. His perceptions, just now, are exalted almost to the point of ecstasy: each sight, sound, touch a separate pang. But he cannot easily endure imperfection; and that is where the fuel for her purgatory will be found. Because natural life is the Mirror of God, he demands a mirror without a flaw.'

'Well,' said Mark, 'I must be working. Another portrait of Miss Alstone is required for the central door: but this time without the hood of modesty, I think. Feltham considers that it will be very nice and appropriate, and I can send her a replica as a wedding gift.'

Emma laughed. Redway turned on her. 'Still amused?' he asked. 'All part of the show? This mess, this spiritual shambles!'

'Not quite that,' said Miss Brewster. 'There's a

resurrection of the soul that precedes the death of the body.'

'See any signs of it? Any real result? It's all up now, of course; and what have we to show for these years? An artistic triumph, you are going to say? Art? Rubbish! Self-deception—the perversion of reality. Look at this place, where we've struggled, agonized, and lived; or tried to live. Is it true; is it sane? You know it's not. It is like the heaven that a child dreams of when it has a feverish cold. I want to see the lies and shams and prettiness go down. I want to see space, the veritable things. We are all in the dark—all bewildered, all doomed—and we make that artistic, and call it religion. We are condemned against our judgment to follow a foul instinct. We make that artistic; it's called love. Oh, give me an honest photograph without fakements—the real, true, squalid, unadulterated thing—and wipe out the pretty pictures. Something solid and actual; the tissue of life!'

'You might begin with yourself. You're a man.'

'A man? Oh, I suppose so; I wear trousers. But where's my manhood—your womanhood? In the scratchings and chippings that we've done here? Why, we stood and watched, trembled almost, whilst that girl dragged Vickery under. We thought that he was holding us up, helping us; and we didn't resent it. D'you know what she called us? "Spiritual vampires, everyone of you," she said

It's true. *She's* living, at any rate; so is he. And you said that you watched life. Good God! From the nursery window! And your passing bell may ring before you've got through the gate at the top of the stairs.'

'That gate,' said Emma, 'is put, I think, to protect adventurers whose ambitions outrun their toddling powers. But there is a good deal of fun to be got from looking through the banisters.'

'Leave that! Come down with me, and take the risk.'

'I can walk alone, thank you.'

'I can't,' replied Jimmy. 'I'm a cripple, every way. Will you help me, or not? Would it amuse you?'

'I don't think that you would endure help for very long. You are curing yourself with knife, medicine, exercise; and I'm the next drug on the list.'

He caught her arm. 'But I must have you,' he said, 'or go under.'

She answered: 'Be careful. I dread this sort of thing. You care for me, but there are so many dangers. I'm ugly; ordinary. Can you bear that? You are an artist.'

'No!' he exclaimed. 'I am a workman, thank God, not an æsthete. I'm sick of this eternal hankering after beauty. It would be heaven to have something that wasn't pretty in my home.'

'There would be the incandescent-gas fittings,' she said. 'But perhaps you may be right. The

obvious is always irritating. It is easier, after all, to live with Durer than with Del Sarto.'

'With you,' he said, 'I should be right, anchored, responsible: the thing would be actual and sane. I'm a realist at heart—all my hope is there—and I've never been allowed to have it. I can understand you; place you. Could you marry me?'

'Marriage!' said Emma. 'That will be hard. Does one want it; now, at this moment? It is a sacrament seldom celebrated after Vespers. Shall I be best satisfied by a tardy completion of my womanhood, or by an unspoilt dream of possibilities that run no danger of becoming facts? A plain woman of thirty-two has not a great choice, you know. At that age we still attract—some of us—but it is the attraction of a weak magnet whose field can be avoided at will. We are good comrades. Men find us safe. *I* am safe. Can you bear a safe wife; and I an inevitable husband?'

'Yes! Better than some sugary connection that gives one toothache of the soul. But I think that I should like you to love me.'

'Perhaps I do. But how can I tell? It's such an ambiguous word; the name of all the desires, from old china to adultery. When I was young, you know, I saw love far away like wonderful hills on the horizon—a definite shape against the sky. It was always ahead of one, something to look at. Now, the hills have dissolved into clouds; and I am in them, rather muddled. Is *that* love?'

'How should I know? But I want you; I'm not complete without you. Do you want me?'

She considered him. 'I believe that I do,' she said. 'It is very odd, to feel so excited about a man. One of the most ordinary of all the adventures, but curiously interesting when it happens to one's self.'

She still held her mallet, and now pressed it against Jimmy's chest, keeping him at arm's length. Her wrist was strong: she held him off without effort. He looked at her eagerly and rather helplessly; at the square, clean-cut face, almost Flemish in its open look of domestic sincerity: at its frame of dark hair parted in the middle and lying close to the head in short, close waves like a ripple of tide. There were several small chips and shavings caught in her hair and dress. This, he felt, was real, satisfying: worker as well as wife. She was the incarnate spirit of craftmanship, steadfast, reasonable, and sincere.

He struggled against her extended arm: but she resisted easily enough.

'Promise first,' she said, 'that you will never imprison me in a dainty drawing-room, with lampshades and cushions and things.'

He answered: 'You in a drawing-room? I'd as soon send the Sphinx to the Zoo.'

'It *would* be a contrast.'

She dropped the mallet. He picked it up, gave it back to her, saying: 'I don't want empty hands,' and kissed her, to his own surprise, with deep

emotion. 'Oh, dear plain face,' he said, 'how glad I am you've not got curly hair! The cursed tyranny of the beautiful is gone for ever now. We are free; in line with the world.'

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'My dear old chap,' said Hugh, 'with a wife like Cathie you'll do wonders. Of course I see you feel a bit slack just now, and it's not to be wondered at. But there's no call to feel so depressed. It's purely physiological.'

'I wish to God you'd hold your tongue.'

'Yes, I know you do, old boy,' said Hugh cheerily. 'But it's good for you to talk yourself out. You are upset because you can't feel as keen about the church as you used to. But it's natural enough, and you must not think *I'm* annoyed. Not a bit of it. You're thinking about Cathie, and she is thinking about her clothes, and so on; and you'd both be much wiser to leave the work alone for a bit. It's only temporary, you know. Being engaged always takes it out of a fellow; at least, if he's a decent chap. But when you've been married a month you'll be as right as a trivet.'

'I wonder. Will *that* cure it?'

'Of course,' said Hugh. 'Married people aren't love-sick; or hardly ever, at least. And besides, family responsibility and so on will keep your nose to the grindstone all right. Why, you may have a baby to be christened here by the time the consecration is done.'

Paul looked round: at the high grey vault, at the wall-veil, which distilled, he thought, an inarticulate reproach; and, in the west, at the little canopy on marble pillars which was destined to shelter the font. He saw in vision the pink-faced, squeaky fruit of his desires brought in lace robe and cashmere cloak to the tomb of its father's purer loves.

'You get married as soon as you can,' said Hugh again. 'Go away, have a jolly good holiday, and leave all the worry to us. Gwent and I can manage it between us. We have had lots of experience: and it would be a bit too bad if a man couldn't have his honeymoon in peace.'

Paul answered: 'Perhaps that is best, after all. There's not much to be done now, except the furniture, and one or two details of the porch. Surely Gwent's eyes will be clear enough for that. I would have liked to see it through, but that is impossible; there's a wall of separation between. Do what you like. I've built it for you. I can't do any more. You have the plan—the scheme. Stick to that: I know it is right. And Gwent knows about the ornament. He will work better when I'm gone; you all will. I'll leave you free.'

CHAPTER X

WITH MALLET AND CHISEL

'Lovers put out the candles and draw the curtains, when they wish to see the god and the goddess; and, in the higher communion, the night of thought is the light of perception.'

COVENTRY PATMORE.

ALL cities are things to slay with. London is a hammer; one can almost hear her rhythmic, pulsing beat. Paris is sharpened steel. London nails Christ to the Cross; Paris plunges the spear into His side.

Vickery passed unscathed by spear and hammer, to fall victim to a more primitive attack. From the ancient battlements of Carcassonne, arrows still meet the invader. Aimed at the eye, they more often pierce the heart. Paul came to this encounter ill-prepared. He was fretted by emotions that chafed his spirit as ill-cut clothing chafes the skin; dulled by violent appetites more violently appeased.

He was a married man. He found the position ridiculous, incredible. Love and building, the ardours of hand and heart; these he understood. One of them he had sacrificed, but Catherine had

given to him the other in its place. Of late, however, that too had been strangely transformed. His Ivory Tower, it seemed, was softly furnished; with sofas, thick curtains, and armchairs. From within one saw little of its fierce beauty; the pure straight walls that had beckoned and repelled him, the haunting sculptures round its gates. Wild magic had been the bait. He had entered the trap to find it cosy.

Both he and Catherine had found the honeymoon trying. The world, in those first mad days, had worn an unexpected, unnatural aspect. Every new caress that his undisciplined passion invented came on him as a shock. To Catherine, on the contrary, each inevitable situation seemed a long-desired, long-meditated thing: so that she was shamed by the fulfilment of ungenerous hopes, where he was yet afraid with great amazement. Thus, each burnt by a separate fever, they struggled together, as two poor pebbles caught in the torrent: grinding, one against the other, till pain and passion have worn them down to the common shape.

They wandered through France, and wondered with each passing day why the artistic communion which they had looked for did not come. Paul obtained fresh torment from each fresh cathedral. They were like the posters at the railway-station, with slightly conventionalized pictures of wonderful lands, once visited, which we know that we shall never see again. From each he feared some abrupt

attack, some crushing revelation of his folly; an irrevocable sentence pronounced, the wilderness of his future life made clear.

He fled from the grave and peaceful saints about the porch of Amiens, from the terrible and watchful spires of Chartres, and the austere queens who stood beneath them; sovereigns of another dynasty than the enchanting Queen of his door. All these—each eager pinnacle, each faithful buttress, and the grey-eyed multitude of mighty spirits which thronged the solemn galleries and strove together in the thrusting vaults—cried with one voice, '*Sursum Corda!*' Their old lovers, the builders of the Gothic, had been ready enough with the respond. *Habemus ad Dominum* was written in the masonry: the works of their hands had praised them in the gates. But he could only answer: 'My heart is held here: I cannot rise!'

Thus the angel of architecture took a whip and drove him southwards. Her lash was long, and Catherine, clinging to her husband, did not escape. Its sharp cuts pierced the cloak of physical content, and woke her to the hopeless sterile torment of one who must watch, but cannot ease, another's pain.

She was bewildered, and horribly lonely. In her presence Paul was maddened, satisfied, entranced; by turns lover, master, slave. He had his moments of intensest tenderness, his moods of staccato authority. That pleased her. She wished her picture to be strong in light and shade.

But there were other hours when the shadow of the stones was upon him. Then he looked at her as a captive at his gaoler ; then she detected in him a longing to be away, at home, at work. For this she clung to him the more closely, determined to learn his lesson, share his secret ; that, however high and hard his life in future, she should not be left behind.

She said to herself, 'I am his now ; he is mine. No more room for renouncing. We cannot be divided again. After all, we were meant for one another. The storm proved that——'

In this mood they came, one cloudy evening, to Carcassonne. Catherine, by some rare good fortune, was tired by the journey, willing to rest. Her energetic efforts to keep pace with him had of late induced in Paul the fatigue which should properly have been hers. Eager for a first glimpse of this wonderful hidden city, unwilling to blur the impression by the preliminary irritations of unpacking —the hunt for soap and hair-brush, the investigation of beds and towels—which replace the lover's meeting at the modern journey's end, he left his wife almost gladly. Standing at the hotel-door to light his pipe, he felt rather like a linnet at the door of its cage ; pausing, beak in air, with a delighted sense of liberty before it stretches its wings.

He wandered down the street, enjoying his freedom with a completeness which seemed peculiar in a bridegroom so very much in love. He was em-

barked on that delicious adventure, the first solitary search of a wonderful thing. Somewhere hidden behind these rather tiresome houses, the little shops and strictly useful market-place that crowded in the plain, he would find the real Carcassonne: the unknown, the romantic, the long desired. Beyond the margins of this flat and busy place, it stood, he knew, safe and remote upon its hill. At any moment, at any corner, it might spring on him.

How splendid to meet it alone, without a sympathetic companion to whom one's emotion might have to be explained! He suddenly became aware that he was having a holiday; tasted some of the sensations of Lancelot when Guinevere was securely bestowed under lock and key in the convent, and he could resume, without hindrance, the quest of the Graal.

He walked down the long street that went, they told him, to the old city; past little dingy shops with old clothes, old iron, old furniture standing outside the doors. The gutters ran with dirty water. Women with copper pails came out from the doorways and added their contributions to the stream. In the fortunate dusk he saw only their white coifs, the fine pose of their figures, and received an impression of rightness and simplicity as he hurried on. The exaltation of the quest stirred in his blood. He was on the track of his stones again; eager, joyous, young. There was no sign as yet of the City on the Hill.

His excitement grew. He felt that he was walking out of the earth-life into another; or at least, to its contemplation. He had shaken off that dreadful fettered sense which makes wedlock so appropriate a word to the wild-hearted; had forgotten his wife, this journey, the tangle that awaited him at home. He was pressing on to something magical; hid, as the Continuing City is hid, by the stupid mesh of daily life—all the foolish complications of business, traffic, pleasure—which man has plaited thick about himself. This place, this Carcassonne, was a relic, he knew, left over from the old times when builders were still seers. It still had its part, doubtless, in the Better Country; stood on a surer foundation than the unstable world of sense. He reached out eagerly towards some glimpse of that lost reality, with all the longing of an exiled child.

Then he came out between two ancient hospitals to the river, and to the bridge; looked up, and between the branches of trees saw the marvellous thing high above him. It stood on the crest of a very green hill, that fell steeply to the waterside, and cut it off from the teeming, ignoble life of the dwellers in the plain: fierce and fairy-like, towers, walls, cathedral, keep, the legacy of ten centuries, their faith and fear. He knew, because of the golden lights upon it, that flowers grew in the crevices of grey masonry, and under the blue and pointed roofs that now made a crisp edge against pale sky. He saw the

crenellated walls which fenced it in, as beautiful words ring many a stronghold of romance. There it stood, inviolate, the very image of a City of the Soul. Even as he looked at it, he found it hard to believe that anything could really be like that.

The sun which had left the valley still shone upon these grave towers; gave to them something of the radiance and remoteness which his dear and lost lands possessed. Behind the battlements, the towering citadel, the long edge of the cathedral roof, he divined the Pattern shining clear Whilst he watched, a company of soldiers in white tunics and marching kit came on to the bridge behind him; and crossed it, and went up the hilly street towards the inconceivable defences of the river-gate. Paul's mind went with them. They were the right inhabitants of the place; of no age, no time. He saw the long line go up the embattled pathway, pass between the beaked towers, and under the machicolations of its fortified gate; heard the drums and bugle far off and very faint. Carcassonne shut them within her impregnable doors: yes! and other inhabitants also.

His vision wandered for an instant beyond the narrow scale of the visible world; and he saw the real city—not its careful, reconstructed shadow—lifted up radiant before him. There were many people on its ramparts. They leaned between the battlements to look down with pity on that poor suburb in the plain where he had anchored himself,

where he must rest. The strong towers, he saw, kept the citadel of that militant Idea which still stands fast on its hill-top against all the assaults of sense. A benediction came to him from the cathedral, with the faint and distant ringing of a bell.

At once the confusions, uncertainties of earth-life died down in him; the old bright flame shot up. Since for a moment he could see, though only very dim and far away, his pattern country, surely with determination and endurance he might win his way home again. Not on this night; not now. Catherine held him. He might not go beyond the bridge. But he was wearied of love in idleness, longed to be back with his stones: knew that without them there was for him no happiness, no reality, no content. Passion had passed like an illness, and he was eager for action; hopeful, as some untried convalescent, who knows nothing of the weakness that his fever has left behind.

But presently the sun left the hill-top. Carcassonne hid her golden flowers; became cold, unfriendly, grey. The twilight brought back that veil of dead centuries which lies between us and the beauty of the past. Her walls were not peopled any longer. She bade him a chilly good-night.

The glamour departed, and he saw himself in true perspective: left upon the bridge, caught miserably between two worlds. He turned back towards the plain. His eyes were full of the vision, his heart

full of foreboding for the empty and difficult life to which he must return. As he came off the bridge on to the roadway he noticed a bit of ground before the hospital; railed off, with faded flowers hung on its fence. There was an image—Our Lady of Consolation—hand outstretched, offering, as it were, her sympathy to all who must return from the ancient, true, and beautiful to the squalid and unreal. Paul looked at it, and passed on. All women, at that moment, seemed much alike.

Catherine, miserably alert, was aware on his return that fresh stones had been added to the wall which grew up between them. He had little to tell her of his walk, and much, she felt, to conceal. She had put on her best embroidered blouse; but he hardly noticed it. She ate little dinner, and went very sadly to bed in the curtained and ceremonial alcove of a room which seemed to have been brought from some sombre palace and engrafted on to a primitive public-house.

* * * * *

In the darkest hour of night, when the tide of life retreats and rocky foundations of our being are left stark and bare, Catherine awoke. Perhaps, rather, a being within her awoke, and seized the slack reins of consciousness: a being peculiarly aware of its own smallness, concentration, intensity, and of the firm outline which cut off its personality from the mere content of its experience, the unknowable objective world without its doors. She was aware,

too, of lying under another sky, bathed by other forces than those which operate in the sane and open day: as those same rocks must feel when the comfortable waters ebb, and leave them dry beneath the stars.

Presently she knew that there was something else—another creature—awake in the dark. It peered at her from the thick blackness of that closely-curtained room, with unloving, resentful eyes. Was this Paul, she wondered; some night-side of his nature come now very stealthily to the surface to survey the field in which it must work out its life? She held her breath, and heard him—his body—breathing very softly. The flesh, at any rate, was asleep. She too closed her eyes, composed her weary body: but the Dweller in the Innermost refused to rest.

Then the unknown creature came a little further from its hiding-place; and she observed that it was bitterly unhappy, and, like all unhappy things, unsafe. It wanted something very badly. There was an obstacle in its path; and against that obstacle the forces of its will were set in battle, with a determination that would not stop at murder, if so they might succeed. She knew very well now the person with whom she was concerned. This was Paul—the real and ardent Paul—the trapped and miserable spirit whom she had maimed, but never won. Its dark companion had risen in its hour of weakness; seized and bound it, used its

powers. Now that companion had sated itself; was limp, drowsy, dull. Whilst it slumbered, the captive rose in his fetters, goaded by the agony of imprisonment: hurled himself against barred window and mercifully padded door.

Catherine's spirit met him there with an exultant knowledge of the massive locks and of her own power of the keys. She triumphed; and her silent antagonist cried out in anguish,

'Let me go! let me go!'

He was asking an impossibility, of course. Were they not married? She concentrated her will upon one violent act of refusal; felt, knew his gesture of despair; and then lay back amongst her pillows, content that she held him so securely. Everything now was very quiet save her own mind, which revolved ceaselessly upon itself with horrible whirring sounds, like some machine from which control has been withdrawn.

In a little while she felt her enemy's presence again; very desperate, forcing the attack with the agonized fury of hopeless, hunted things. It seemed to have gained strength; had issued by some secret postern from the fortress in which she had chained it, and was near her in the dark. It desired her death, because she was its gaoler. She imagined murderous fingers that closed upon her throat, and started up in bed with outstretched arms: but nothing met them. Her body began to tremble, with those long spasmodic shudders that have no physical origin,

but seem forced to the surface by the veritable movements of the soul.

Again she heard Paul breathing very quietly, and was glad to believe that he slept.

Again that wailing cry which spoke to her spirit : ' Let me go ! let me go !'

Someone within her gates—traitor or true patriot, she could not tell—rose then, and pleaded for the prisoner. Catherine's will returned abruptly upon itself, and civil war—egotism fighting desperately for its life—was added to the miseries of the night.

She said : ' He is mine ! I have given him all——'

The prisoner's advocate replied : ' Not all.'

She said : ' What have I held back ?'

The other voice answered : ' The best and hardest of the gifts of love.'

' I have given myself.'

' That has no value. You must give *him*.'

' I have offered myself to the uttermost. Am I to have nothing in exchange ?'

' Can you not forget for a moment that you belong to a commercial family ?'

Still Paul's quiet breathing mocked her. There was no one to share her vigil, help her in this battle. She felt horribly alone, and resented her loneliness ; as every bride has done since Eve found out that Adam did not really understand.

The inner voice, like the daughters of the horseleech, cried perpetually : ' Give ! give !'

She said : ' I can't ! it is my life ! I cannot spare it ; I shall always be incomplete.'

The prisoner's advocate was amused.

She said : ' Oh, I don't understand ! Where am I being driven ? What have I got to do ?'

' Let go !'

' It will hurt dreadfully.'

The other voice said, ' Yes.'

She saw a line of light between the curtains. It came and played upon the wall above Paul's bed. The sharp eye of day was looking in upon the battlefield. At once Catherine felt the relief of its presence, the sense of the great world outside that darkened room. A mule cart went down the street with the ringing of bells and the groaning of axles. As it passed into the distance she envied it. It was out in wide spaces ; shared the daily business of the earth.

Then it occurred to her that she would go, too ; back to the natural life, to which she belonged. Somewhere—anywhere—on the road and in the sun. That old and stifled desire to hurt herself, to suffer, came back ; and she recognised it as one with the prisoner's friend. She had given Paul everything, had taken nothing. She would go away with empty hands. She tasted for a moment the passion of poverty ; that strange, exciting wine which Love, once in a way, holds to the pilgrim's lips.

She left her bed, put on her clothes very softly. She had not realized the oddness, the absurdity of

her action; the fatuity of this symbolic flight. It seemed the one natural thing to do. Paul must be freed. Pride came now, like reinforcements after the battle, and urged the impossibility of accepting peace, happiness, salvation, for which another—even when that other is one's husband—pays the bill. The Feltham Linication Company had owed no man anything. But Catherine was in debt; and perceived with disgust that there was no possibility of an immediate settlement. At least, she must no longer keep her creditor in chains.

As she left the room she turned, and looked at her husband. At once she perceived that he was not wholly asleep: that he was aware of her action, and lay there quietly, at peace. She felt his half-conscious spirit watching her, with a dim sense of satisfaction, of possible escape.

That hurt her. She had been very kind to her prisoner, after all.

CHAPTER XI

THE PERFECT ASHLAR

'When the first morning air
Blew from the tower, and waved his locks aside,
His hand with gentle care
Did wound me in the side;
And in my body all my senses died.'

SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS
(*Translated by Arthur Symons*).

CATHERINE went bravely down the long street that led to the river; though once the hotel was out of sight, she ceased to enjoy her undertaking. The cobble-stones were hard to her thin shoes: the shut and silent houses, the wide colourless boulevard which she crossed, depressed her.

She came to the bridge; and suddenly, for her as for Paul, the city sprang to view upon its hill, and the suburb faded away. The grey and immemorial city, poised on its green slopes, each little hooded tower full of wise eyes that looked out on the great world. The sun rose behind it; gave to it the dark and menacing air of things that are, for us, too near the light It stood high up, complete, unearthly; the obvious ending of a pilgrimage. Once

she saw it, Catherine ceased to run away from the past, but pressed forward to the future: up the hill, and by a little stony path to the grassy slopes beneath its walls.

Two women came out from a broken postern in one turret—a mere ragged hole in the curtain of defence—and went down towards their day's work in the fields. Mrs Vickery watched them away, and then crept in, crossed the lists to an inner gate, and stopped; astonished at herself, astonished still more by the strange still world into which she had stepped.

She was within the impregnable walls of Carcassonne; in a silent city of the Middle Ages, amongst the crisp and intricate forms of a militant civilization that had known its own mind, had heard, even in the clash of battle, the voice of its own soul.

Jutting buttresses, crenellated ramparts, mighty towers were all about her: over her head the evil slit of a machicolation, from which sudden death had fallen long ago. The strange and complex beauty of it caught at her heart. She tried for a moment to regain her old insolent attitude toward the venerable and picturesque. But the problems of this place struck deeper than the studios; were related to the first fiery strata of life. She was far from the world of slow accretion, the secondary world that she understood; had entered into Paul's universe, to find herself an alien there.

She went a little way, came beneath the huge

beaked towers of the castle, passed it, and saw the unmistakable pinnacles, the long crossed ridge of a church. It reminded her of other churches, and of another life, which was her own. The futility of her adventure struck her suddenly; her bewilderment and fatigue. She already perceived in the offing the inevitable anticlimax of a return which could not long be delayed.

Whilst yet there was time she must put walls between herself and this amazing landscape, find a stepping-stone to bring her back to ordinary things; some quiet place where she might review the situation, adjust the divergent ideals of the young married woman and the pilgrim soul.

There was a little open door at one corner of the cathedral. Catherine went in. She found a sombre nave, with round and heavy arches brooding on stupendous piers; and in the east a sudden glory, where the Romanesque halted, hesitating, as it were, before the altar steps, and the Gothic spirit seized upon the stones. In this forest of huge columns, in the difficult plaits and tormented demons on their capitals, in the dusky light that came through little windows in thick walls, there was a sense, for her, of long wandering in dim places, and of a final transcendent attainment when the sanctuary should be reached.

She walked eastwards and stood at the crossing. She felt quite at home, quite safe; and wondered why this should be so. She came to the transept,

and passed abruptly from gloom into a radiant world of soaring shafts and painted windows. There was something unearthly in these great walls of jewelled glass; in the slender and delicate columns which separated them, or held, as it were on finger-tips, the distant vault.

Each column bore a grave and happy saint, who stood sentinel before the mysteries and clasped, as one clasps great treasure, the instrument of his death. Six little altars flanked the sanctuary: on each she saw a symbol of torment. Catherine suddenly perceived that she stood in a palace of suffering: that this beauty, radiance, ecstasy, which caught the soul and held it, was evoked by the double spells of love and pain.

As she so looked, an old man, who had watched her with curiosity, rose from his *prie-dieu*, rattled his rosary, and touched her arm.

'Ces saints, madame,' he said, 'méritent votre attention comme touriste, sans doute; mais aussi un peu comme Chrétienne. Ce qu'il faut remarquer, c'est qu'ils tiennent dans leurs mains les instruments de leurs supplices—qui sont aussi les instruments de leur gloire.'

She moved from him restlessly. Paul, she remembered, held her; the instrument, if not of his death, then of his torment. But he had wished to cast the burden away.

In the south transept she came upon an image of Saint Roch, standing in a niche above his altar. He

pointed to the wound that had been won in the effort to heal others. Catherine wondered whether those others minded, as she minded, being saved at the cost of another's pain: the ineffectual torment of it, the biting humiliation.

The angel supporting the image held a scroll which said, 'Pray for us!'

'Oh, I won't be prayed for! I won't; I won't! I'll do my own dirty work!' she cried.

Next door to Saint Roch, as mortuary to hospital, there was a little altar of the dead; and a poor-box beside it, 'Pour les âmes du Purgatoire.' She put money in that. It was no charity; rather an investment.

She turned, and went past several other chapels to the northern end of the transept. She could see an arched recess, some poor flowers in a jar before it, and the guttered ends of candles on their spiked frame: hardly an altar, perhaps some indulgenced image or venerated tomb. There was sculpture at any rate, firm and fine. Two odd, cowled creatures who held a trefoiled gable that broke above into crisp and flame-like foliage; tapering into the air as if the very stone, brought to these holy uses, had blossomed like Joseph's rod under the Divine Breath.

In the deep niche that it covered, Catherine saw a very old image of Our Lady, who held her dead Son upon her knee. There were traces of faint colour on the figures still, bringing them from the cold white

world of abstract thoughts in which statues live to the coloured countries of human experience. It was no graceful presentment of pious melancholy ; no grotesque symbol of unendurable torment, as that poor Mater Dolorosa whose pierced heart had once moved her to contempt. This Virgin was a homely and matronly person, hooded and coiffed : not the Queen of Angels, but that ' very respectable Mother and Pattern of Womanhood ' so often invoked in the prayer-books of old France. The practical housewife, full of sense and full of sadness, who had looked life between the eyes, and yet preserved a vulnerable heart. Even in her misery, she seemed glad to know her Child quiet, His pain done. Whatever else might happen, He could not be crucified any more. At this hour He was really her Child ; no longer her God, but her darling, dependent on her, helpless, asleep. Her hand was under His neck, supporting the head, as often in His babyhood ; all His long curled hair turned back from the heavy wreath of thorn and falling over her knee.

She suffered, and was content to suffer, knowing it now well with Him. It was very evident from this that His was the peace and hers the greater pain. Catherine perceived clearly that it must always be so for the woman, when the man that she loves is crucified.

Whilst she watched this figure, and read into it very naturally, something of her own supremely

interesting pain, the bell rang a few times, idly and languidly; and several old, unshaved men, three aproned women with baskets, and a thin tabby cat, came into the church. A little boy in black calico blouse, leather belt, and hobnailed boots, appeared, and lit two candles on the high altar. In a few moments more a priest followed him, and began to say the Mass, very quickly and softly; as if he were afraid, at that early hour, of startling the angels from their sleep. He addressed himself directly to his Master, absorbed, as it were, in a whispered colloquy, a magic opportunity for the confidences of love. He was not aware of his congregation, who had crept in before the fret of earning seized them, to breathe for a moment the atmosphere which he evoked.

Catherine knelt before the Pietà, closed her eyes. She caught here and there the superb phrases of the liturgy; out of the intense quiet of that empty cathedral the muttered words came with a certain unearthly significance. She was sure that she could detect the voices of the sculptured saints in the Gloria, that she worshipped with them, and with another mighty company which had found sanctuary before the altar of this God: the God who chose suffering as the final term of existence, the consummation of the quest. She no longer rebelled at her own pain: rather, she desired to increase it, if so Paul's wound could be healed.

She opened her eyes, and looked into the sad and steadfast face of God's Mother, brooding heavy-hearted over her dead. It seemed to her now that she looked at no symbol, no portrait even, but rather into the grave and patient face of Life herself; intent on the eternal procession of seedtime and harvest, birth and death, her long maternal day of love and pain.

And this all-enduring Mother leaned towards her, and said:

'My daughter, my little daughter, is it too hard for you? Is the burden too great? But I have borne it too; yes, to the uttermost. Did not my Child—my Son—my love—die for me? For all the world, and so for me in it? He hung upon the Cross to save His Mother, who would have suffered hell so willingly to save Him. I had to bear that. Are you so finely built that you must be your own redeemer? It is necessary that the pure be sacrificed in order that the impure may be saved. Will you deprive your lover of his everlasting crown, rather than renounce your renunciation?'

Catherine whispered, 'No, no! I'll give all—even that—even *him*.'

At once, the strain was relaxed, and she rested her forehead gladly and wearily against the strip of purple calico which made an altar of this niche. The Mass was at the Preface. She heard the priest say, '*Vere dignum et justum est, æquum et salutare;*'

and, with a sudden peaceful sense of participation in the eternal sacrifice, of a true union at last with Paul—those mystical nuptials of the Cross in which the senses have no share—she acknowledged that it was meet and just indeed.

There came upon the church a hush that made itself felt. The priest had begun to recite the Canon. Catherine also at that moment made an offering, begged a consecration. She saw for an instant the true shape of her life, as it is seen from the right side by one who stands clear of the tangling threads. She did not know what would happen in the future, but she did know that it did not matter in the least. She had found her poise; opened her heart; cleared the ground for the laying of those sharp, hard stones which build up the invisible shrine. She heard, as in a dream, the sacring bell, and presently the Paternoster. *Adveniat regnum!* No need to ask that. She knelt at its open gate.

When the Agnus had been said there was a movement amongst the people behind her, and presently footsteps that approached. She heard close by a voice; the voice of that same old man who had accosted her. It said:

'Ce qu'on admire surtout en cette sculpture, Monsieur, c'est l'expression de douleur sur le visage de la Sainte Vierge. On admire aussi son bel état de conservation. C'est une œuvre de la fin du treizième siècle.'

She rose to her feet, quickly and clumsily; turned, and met her husband's eyes. They were full of amazement. She blushed violently. He at once looked away, and walked towards the door. She followed him: glad, in spite of herself, to think that he had pursued her so quickly, wondering what spell had worked this sudden change of heart.

Outside the cathedral he observed: 'I told them to have coffee ready in half an hour.'

When they had come through the river-gate, were beyond the fortifications, he took an envelope from his pocket, and gave it to her, saying: 'This came just before I left.'

She looked at the handwriting, and understood. Paul, having received an annoying letter, had abruptly discovered the advantages of the married state. He wanted somebody to share his irritation, and Catherine's sympathy, however inadequate, was his by right. He could not relinquish it.

Something had hurt him, and he ran to her for consolation; as even big boys will run to their outgrown nurses, if only the bruise be sufficiently brown. She would put her arm about him willingly enough, and apply all soothing unguents in her power. As she read Hugh's letter, she was aware of the anger, misery, despair, which mounted like a tidal wave in the man at her side, till it threatened the very heights of his spirit; and of a fortitude which arose in her to help and to restrain.

'Dear old chap,' wrote Mr. Feltham, 'I didn't bother you before, as I knew that for once you would have other things to think of besides the church. But now you've been married a bit you may like to hear what progress we have made since you left. A good deal has happened, and I may say that we are almost complete. We could have the consecration any time you thought convenient; let me know, and I'll write to the bishop.

'Now as to what we've done. Feeling a bit at sea after you left I got a fellow through the Guild of Saint Eloy, who is a decorative artist in a big way, to come and look round. What with Redway always spooning Miss Brewster, and Gwent talking rot no fellow could understand, it was positively necessary to get an expert's advice. Gwent, who is really getting to be a sulky brute, would have it that he's only a clever ass; which is bosh, for he's done up several cathedrals. His name is Aylwin Thomson, which is just the sort of name good decorative artists *do* have. He gave me no end of tips, which I've acted up to. I'm sorry now we didn't go to the expense of having someone like that from the first. In a church, he said, one required richness of effect to act on the religious emotions, and all that bare wall above the dado gave a very plain, poverty-stricken look. Of course, I saw what he meant directly, and we've got some very jolly stone diapering—quite the effect of hand-carved stuff at half the price, I'm sure you'll like it—and that breaks up the surface nicely. He thought it a pity, for economy's sake, that we hadn't grained the vestry panelling. It makes a very nice clean wall, and after all it does seem rather rot to have art

in a *vestry*. However, no use crying over spilt milk.

'As to the chancel, he thought that very cold; suggested coloured glass in the little windows of the apse; but I left that for you to decide. It occurred to me, as the Four Crowned Saints were masons, that the triangle and compasses in ruby and blue would be appropriate and look well. Anyhow the beautiful worked sanctuary carpet which your mother has sent brightens it up a great deal. It's a Gothic pattern, a pelican in her piety on a scarlet ground, so the symbolism goes nicely with the Adoration of the Lamb up above. Of course one is an animal emblem and the other a bird, but they are both quite medieval and nice. And the pelican being in the Old Testament and the Lamb in the New makes the *idea* very complete.

'Also your father ran up to town the other day, and had a look round. He did not quite like one or two little things, and I am sure you will say I was right in defering to his opinion. It would be a pity to make friction so early in the day, or oppose the *Mind of the Church*. He said, of course he knew we meant it all right, but it seemed to him an error of judgment, in a *new* church, to have the Virgin Mary over the central door. In old buildings people made allowances, but he felt sure it would offend the bishop. He didn't think the baby made it any better; the modern feeling, he said, was against this worship of immaturity. So I moved her to the side entrance, where she looks just as nice, and got an Agnus Dei from that Birmingham firm for the top of the Jesse Tree.

'Then we had one real stroke of luck. After our last board meeting one of the directors made a very generous offer. I was awfully pleased, for of course one hardly expects practical business men to take much interest in a *church*. He said he heard we hadn't got any stained glass in the west window, and he'd like to give it; he and his wife together. He had a narrow shave with his motor-car the other day—killed the chauffeur, and so on—and his idea is that the window shall be partly a thankoffering for his own safety (paid for by his wife), and partly a memorial to the poor chap, which I thought very decent of him. We talked it over, and I suggested the Ascension, perhaps, for the central light, and on each side the horses of the Apocalypse, with bronze breast-plates and flaming breath, and Elijah in the Chariot of Fire, which would be jolly decorative as well as appropriate. You might get Cathie to sketch it out next time you have a wet day and can't go sight-seeing, as naturally enough he'll like to see something for his money——'

Catherine finished the letter, and walked on for a few moments in silence. She knew in her heart that Paul, whilst he demanded sympathy as his marital due, secretly assigned to her a certain responsibility in this farcical disaster. All his love, sorrow, longing was poured out, at this instant, on his poor ruined child. She did not resent that. She was no longer the clever and contentious Catherine of the Wheels; aspired rather to the high humility of Catherine of the Veil.

As she returned the letter to its envelope she noticed a postscript :

'P.S.—I forgot to tell you that Gwent has suddenly chucked his job and is going into a monastery. An unmanly sort of idea, to bury yourself alive like that : but he always had a very Roman tone of mind. Says he wants to work in enduring materials, which is like his cheek. I always made a point of having stone of the best quality, and, as Thomson says, there are plenty of people nowadays who would have been content with squeezed terra-cotta.'

Catherine looked at her husband. 'Enduring materials!' she said. 'That's it! Oh, my poor Paul, don't grieve. What does this matter? Throw the past behind you. There's something bigger to build.'

'You don't understand. He's made it laughable. I would have borne any punishment but that.'

She answered, 'Oh, yes, but it's all right really—all square—even your being hurt. Do you think that it is easy for me to see you suffer like this? But I know now. It happens : and if it happens it is sane and endurable, it is meant.'

'Don't you see that this is the end?'

She turned to him. Her face was radiant, full of hope and peace. For one instant it seemed that some inhabitant of the Better Country, infinitely pitiful yet infinitely glad, peeped at him through her eyes.

'No!' she said. 'It is the beginning. Let's go home; back to the hard part, the disappointment. You have something to fight with at last. And we have seen each other fail: that is the great matter. Now, we shall know how to help.'

He looked at this new Catherine with envy. They walked down the hill side by side.

CHAPTER XII

THE SUBSTITUTED WORD

'When I was a King and a Mason—in the open noon of my pride,
They sent me a Word from the Darkness—They whispered and called me aside.
They said—"The end is forbidden." They said—"Thy use is fulfilled,
"And thy palace shall stand as that other's—the spoil of a King who shall build."'

RUDYARD KIPLING.

ONLY the great mystic and the small biologist can look easily and without shrinking at the face of the belovèd dead. Faith and fortitude, the old consolations and excuses, run from the sight of the bier. Our very sense of irony plays us false. The broken flesh, its imminent corruption, is then evident; the spirit very far away. Because of this dreadful moment, men first desired and then believed the resurrection of the body to be no less a verity than the immortality of the soul.

Vickery, returning to England, knew that he travelled towards this sight. Whether the lifeless face be flesh or stone matters little to the mourner; the passion and the agony are born rather of the

lover than of the beloved. Our darlings, he felt, should be buried at the moment of their death: but his had been embalmed, would stare at him with sightless eyes for evermore. There was no way of escape; no funeral would heap decent earth between himself and the hideous thing. It would enjoy, very properly, a long life dedicated to usefulness, morality, and practical religion. He must learn to look without flinching at the disfigured features, at each insult offered to the real and secret world: must drop, once for all, from the unsubstantial heights on which an artist lives during the years of effort to the fertile plains of conventional reality.

He felt that this operation was best performed alone. On the morning which followed his return he rose very early, took the keys, and went to the church.

At half-past four, even our western suburbs hush their shrill and eager voices for a while. Civilization is still between the sheets, an American watch by its bedside, its window slightly opened at the top. The barbarous simplicities of the country have their way. Its ancient sounds, the rumble of vegetable carts going towards London, the tramping note of hay waggons, the persistent treble of birds, fill the pale and vacant streets. The plane-trees whisper to each other strange tales of invisible forests; each blade of grass is brisk with meaning, knowing itself still a 'little emerald set in the City of God.' Paul noticed the details of this world with an unusual

and angry attention; its immortal activities, its wonder, mystery, power, which even the best wood pavement could not crush. It had a remote and magical air, for he no longer belonged to it, but rather to the empty and orderly landscape of our comfortable modern life: the nice little roads, tree-bordered, like stunted boulevards which the British spirit keeps within joyless bounds, the neat stucco boxes, shabby cricket-fields and mighty factories which seemed, in the clean, quiet air of early morning, so monstrous a perversion of reality.

Coming to the Four Crowned Saints, he perceived it to be in admirable harmony with this environment. The outer court had been freshly gravelled, lumber and building-sheds cleared away. It presented to the eye a brilliant orange surface, as of a public recreation ground which is kept up with unusual care. A few rhododendrons had been planted in the corners: the stock-brokers of the vegetable world, shiny, prosperous, luxuriant.

The church looked uncomfortably neat and clean. It had been tidied up, like a child for a school-treat, in honour of his return, and endured with difficulty the architectural equivalents of starch, pomade, and soap. The Agnus Dei of the Birmingham firm was resplendent above the porch. It was beautifully finished. One neatly chiselled foot clutched the machine-made Banner of Redemption; the curly fleece lay in serried ranks from nose to tail, like a colony of well-conducted wormcasts. Paul imagined

to himself the laughter with which his angels had greeted this ornament : the crown of that Door of Beauty by which he had once supposed that all the world would enter, to receive the benediction of his friends.

That dream was done. Behind the crisp standard of a strictly dogmatic salvation, the wild and splendid banners of the sunrise still hung in the sky. He thought that he saw amongst them the flaming sword which was the symbol of his banishment. As Cain was the firstfruit of the Fall, so there was born of him now a longing to kill something. Hugh ? Catherine ? Himself ? He neither knew nor cared. All were detestable alike.

He unlocked the door and went in, possessed by the black wrath of an impassioned workman who cannot endure the sight of good material turned to evil use. The big clean nave, full of detail and empty of magic, looked, in the sharp morning light, extremely cheerful. It breathed a spirit of decorous and well-ventilated Christianity ; as of some Urban District Council engaged in suitable religious exercise. In the western bay he found a small collection of sample chairs. There was one in purple wood and green rushes, with patent combined hat-rack and hinged kneeling-pad, which he was sure that Mr. Feltham would prefer. He sat upon it now, and reviewed, bit by bit, each element of disaster.

Above the austerely-moulded string-course, which cut the aisle walls at ten feet above the ground, he

saw the new stone diapering; a maddening succession of accurate grey rosettes. It killed the virile quality of his masonry as foolish adornments kill the dignity of man. Redway's embroidered hangings had been placed beneath it. His angels, as they led the procession of life, wore a slightly sardonic expression. The very saints in the stained windows seemed to feel the absurdity of their situation; casting the keen light of eternity on to these temporal manifestations of bad taste. No awful presences, no veiled and secret queens, awaited their lover; but Paul detected certain tutelary spirits, the proper guardians of a reasonable and convenient faith. They were humming, he thought, a popular hymn.

It was impossible for him to recognise, under the early Victorian sanctuary carpet with its cheerful little pelicans and childish crosses in floss-silk, those sure foundations which he had planted deep in the real, undying, absolute world: or behind these dreary stones, which seemed divorced by their horrid neatness from the majestic process of the earth, the living lines of shaft and vaulting that shot up, he knew, into the changeless skies of Heart's Desire. He longed for the friendly atmosphere of that hidden and mystical country, the reassuring presence of its people. Their nearness aggravated his passion. He knew that the strange and shadowless light was before his blinded eyes; that under his feet, yet intangible for him, were the fragrant and peaceable fields. Though his mind was obsessed

and tormented by the silly, self-spun illusion of ugliness, he was encompassed on every side—held, nourished, helped—by Immortal Beauty, by the incorruptible and timeless habitations of the soul.

Because his church had been founded in that universe, she still held for him memories of his lost inheritance. The old passion of the stones surged up in him as he looked at the gaudy trappings of his dead. His heart, he knew, was set for ever on the builder's quest; but it had brought him to an impassable place. He stood, like Lancelot, at the door of the lonely chapel. Only Galahad could enter with the angels and receive the revelation of the Graal.

He thought of the ineffable mystery which is celebrated by the Brothers of the Rosy Cross: when the secret and holy Word is burned in the empty chalice; caught up, like the Graal itself, by invisible hands to heaven. He had drunk of that chalice, had seen the Word withdrawn from him: the Word that should have revealed to its initiate the secret beauty of the world. It was burned up by the fire of a passion that left no place for the cold flames which play upon the artist's cross; the flames of purity and renunciation.

He had drifted, almost insensibly, from anger to sadness: to that aching, impotent desire for a return upon the road, to past opportunities, dead happiness, dead friends, which is the real and merciless victory of the grave. He glanced back upon his

life, as one may look at great plains from a hill-top, and see space, unity, horizon, not visible from the level lanes of work and play. He saw the City on the Hill—the sole object of his pilgrimage—the straight road that led to it, and the signposts upon that road ; the stones of his craft, and the mysteries, symbols, rituals, which had given to that craft its transcendental interpretation, made a link with the invisible builders to whose secret it aspired. All that pageant of mystical experience which is dramatized in the Mason's progress from apprentice to master, from the promise of the Building-word to the attainment of its earthly substitute, passed before him in vision. In each he saw reflected some act of his sensual life. He, too, had pressed on, confident of the secret, from substituted word to substituted word : had laboured with his hands, that his spiritual dream might be fulfilled. But he had been deceived, had mistaken the road. No room for repentance : no turning back on the way.

Where was he now ? What was his position ? In the world's eyes, that of a promising young architect, who has made a good marriage and finished his first big job : a nice, artistic church, much less peculiar than one might have expected. In his wife's eyes, that of a beginner, with bigger things to build. In his masters' eyes—what ?

He heard then within his mind the whispered phrases of another ceremony ; as if those masters would answer and reassure him, and only by the

language of ritual could pierce the cloud by which he had shut himself from their world.

'What hour is it?'

'The Hour of a perfect Mason.'

'What is the Hour of a perfect Mason?'

'The instant when the veil of the temple is rent, when darkness and consternation spread upon the face of the earth, the light is obscured, the tools of masonry are broken, the blazing star disappears, the pointed cubic stone sweats blood and water, and the Word is lost.'

'Most excellent brother, since Masonry undergoes so great a preparation, let us employ our diligence in fresh labours for the recovery of the Word.'

It was the Ceremony of the First Apartment of the Masonic Knights of the Eagle; referring, as he had been taught, to certain legends of the Crucifixion. He had not supposed it possible that this strange and sombre dialogue could have any bearing upon actual life.

Darkness, confusion, loss! Was this perfection? Were the broken tools, the lost Word, the extinguished star, true emblems of the builder's consecration? In honourable building, undertaken for the sake of that hidden architecture which it typified in the world of sense, he had seen the whole object of Masonry. That world of sense, once his friend and agent, had betrayed him. To what end? That salvation might come, perhaps, by his misery and failure; as it came to man by the treachery

of the Garden and the shame of the Cross. The ritual proclaimed anguish and darkness—the *noche escura*—to be one with the greatness of preparation. No need to cry, like a child in the dark, because the candle had been taken away.

Suddenly he perceived that it had not been taken from him after all. The ceremonial words, whispered at this early morning hour when earth lies very near its archetype, worked their old magic. They shut the gaping gates of the senses, roused him for an instant from the tiresome dream of life. The walls of the world went down. The white east windows towards which he looked, stained now by the flames of sunrise as by hidden altar fires, opened, expanded to mighty avenues of escape. They left the dingy and imperfect plane of sensual experience to plunge deep into the heart of hidden country.

Paul, his spirit focussed on their splendours, woke to consciousness of the ever-present day. His stones, and Mr. Feltham's egregious adornments, were still vaguely perceptible, like walls of cloudy glass : but he had little attention to spare for these unsubstantial shadows, for he stood again in the real world, bathed in its light, hushed by its silence. All was well. The strange craftsmen of eternity were all about him ; no wall of separation had been built, no unfriendliness created. He had but put a bandage before his eyes ; a bandage now lifted for a moment, by some potent and merciful Power, that he might orientate himself before the dark returned.

His masters would never leave him, nor he them. He would move amongst them as a blind man moves amongst his friends, who cannot, for all their kindness, make him see.

He was lifted, as long ago, to the incorruptible landscape beyond the threshold. Behind the black shapes of the actual earth, it appeared with all the splendours of the dawn: strange, unforgettable, distinct. He saw its hills on the horizon and clefts here and there in them, from which a magical fire gushed out. Snowdrifts lay in the corners of the hills; and the river curled like mist about their feet, and went to pour itself out in deep pools in the secret places of the woods. He breathed that air of paradise which comes in happy moments to stir the drawn curtains of the domesticated soul. The warring passions of stones and senses, his poor flimsy church, the parodies of light and colour which had confused his downward-looking eyes, floated away.

His masters brought him to the road which led up to the City. He saw its white towers, shining very gloriously above the shadow of his broken hope. He passed to the great temple, entered its sculptured gates, saw the marvellous processions that moved eastwards: powers and presences, men and angels, pressing to the light. He looked at them curiously, fancying that he detected on their faces that same ardour which had shone in his wife's eyes when she went down with him from Carcassonne to

the plain. The perfume of incense, the music of a perpetual adoration, came from behind the veil. There the Word, he knew, was worshipped without ceasing; deep hidden yet made manifest by its ten rings of concentric light, the ten emanations of the Ineffable Name.

But his place was not in the temple. Presently he left it; and saw then another road, another layer of the landscape of life. This road was dimly lit; it ran through the misty plain of sensual illusion; yet it offered to him a pilgrimage full of hope. It astonished him to perceive that the business of those who trod it was building also: the building of spiritual temples, which man cannot destroy. He saw many processions: not radiant, but travel-stained, dogged, weary. They were driven eternally to the carrying of new stones, the erection of new arches in the House of Life. Breeding and dying, the masonry of the race, were the labours asked of the pilgrims on that way. The great angel of architecture awaited her lovers at its end. With each willing step towards her, a stone was laid on the invisible shrine.

Still in the clean light of reality, still shielded by the everlasting silence, he saw, deep in that Heart of God on which the flaming windows opened, the whole scheme of things exhibited and made clear.

> 'Earth and heaven were rolled up like a scroll;
> Time and space, change and death, had passed away.'

He was snatched from the false dualism of matter

and spirit to the mystical union of the shadow and the idea. No longer with the single eye of the determined visionary, but rather with the sane outlook of an immortal spirit that has learned, not despised, the lesson of the flesh, he perceived the life of the body also to be holy, needful, consecrate. It was no squalid illusion, no foul miasma from which one must escape, but a firm and friendly highway which led by difficult places to the mystic City of the Quest.

In the supernal light which Divine Love poured unceasingly through this universe, he saw the Christian myth, real to him now and very near, as the one perfect recapitulation of the life-history of the soul. He understood the necessity of a descent—for every soul, every son of God—into the prison of the senses; the probation of the Cross and misery of failure actual and desirable; a willing sacrifice that others may have freedom, the proper prelude of an entrance into peace. He saw also the outlines of a mystical substitution, by which the spiritual slaying of the Lover may work the redemption of the beloved: and, remembering the changed Catherine, gentle and steadfast, radiating he knew not what atmosphere of serenity and faith, he acknowledged it well that there should be an artist the less, if thus there might be an angel the more.

He knew now that the passion of the stones was but another facet of the passion of salvation; the raising up of the rocks, the crude substance of

the earth, to the purposes of beauty and adoration, a mere shadowing forth of that upbuilding of spirits in love and pain, which is the business of transcendental masonry, the architecture of the Invisible Shrine. As he had given himself, called upon his workers to give, wholly and willingly, to the service of the stones, so the perfect mason must give all for the better adornment of that temple : the talents of gold and silver, the stones wrought in the quarry, and also the cedars of Lebanon, emblems of the abundant earth.

The light had left him ; and that landscape of many dimensions into which, for one instant, he had looked. He could not see the City to which he travelled, the mighty river which came from it, the shining trees that he had greatly loved, nor those who walked incessantly beneath them. One only he saw, who lingered, as if unwilling to leave him companionless. It was his own angel, the maimed Angel of the Transept, who had guarded his childhood's home. Its face still wore the delicious smile of one who looks with great simplicity on holy things; and Paul was glad, in his gathering darkness, to think that with the mending of maimed angels his years of vision had opened and closed. Presently it went away, the clouds descended, and there was only the long grey road, the hard grey stones upon it, the angel of architecture far away at the journey's end.

He opened his eyes again upon the sensual world :

came back to the confining walls of his church, and perceived that he now stood close beside the altar. Unconsciously, like the procession which he gazed upon, he had walked eastwards towards those avenues which lead to the eternal light. He knelt and kissed that cold altar. The insurgent craftsman within still mourned its lost singleness of eye, but there was no longer an accent of rebellion in his grief. The old builders, his masters, were accustomed as he remembered to immure a living victim, chaste and unspotted of the world, in the foundations of their towers; that its soul, flying upwards, might animate and defend the soaring walls. He saw now in such victims the true adepts of masonry, whose happy death was one with the consummation of the Quest. The Word which he sought and lost had been Spiritual Chastity. He had received instead the substituted word of *Sacrifice.*

He left the church then, locked the door, and turned towards home: setting his face, once for all, towards the steady years of professional duty, domestic affection, material profit, and spiritual loss which lay between him and the journey's end. What would arrive there, he wondered? Imperfect angel or successful architect? Neither, perhaps: but, if he could contrive it, a completed man.

He crossed the gravelled court, passed the Feltham Reading-rooms, looked up at their green shutters, copper hinges, and fantastic eaves. From under one gable a heart-shaped ventilating hole winked at

him with approval. Its demeanour suggested that his programme, however strange it might appear from the point of view of artist or mystic, could not fail to be satisfactory to the honest, wholesome sentiment of the British race.

But there was little time for meditation : would be in all the future little time. It was already half-past eight ; breakfast would be waiting. He recollected that Catherine was now a wife ; worse, a housewife. She would not like the coffee to get cold.

His angels laughed a little at this : but there was an accent of pity in their laughter.

THE END

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